PRAY LIKE THE POETS: FINDING YOUR VOICE

By

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ABSTRACT

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Spontaneous, spoken prayer has been a challenge for me as far back as I can remember. I thought attending an Interfaith/Interspiritual seminary would provide me with the words I needed and would simultaneously remove the fear and dread I felt when asked to pray out loud. Unfortunately, that was not to be. My research project was two-fold. First, I went on a quest to learn to pray with ease, then I developed and delivered a workshop for others who, like me, were interested in praying more skillfully in public.

My research questions centered on scriptural prayers, the language of prayer, and the pedagogy of spoken prayer. My journey took me out into the world of prayer and poetry and returned me back again to my own heart where the lover and the beloved are one, and where all prayers reside.

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." (T.S. Eliot)[1]

[1] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," in *Four Quartets* (London : Faber & Faber, 1995), 49.

For my family

You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.

Desmond Tutu

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Knowing that I can't possibly acknowledge all the people who have influenced my life over the past half century, I will strive to name those who traveled with me these last few years.

I must start with my NYTS classmate and partner on this journey, Reverend Diane Rooney. Diane and I graduated One Spirit Interfaith Seminary together in 2014 and it was she who suggested (firmly) that we apply to NYTS for the fall of 2017. Thank you to Reverend Dr. José Román, also of the class of 2014, who not only inspired the idea but arranged for our interview and walked beside us from the application process through graduation.

My site team and workshop participants will forever be intertwined in my heart with this journey. Because of these two powerful groups of companions, I never felt alone. My site team consisted of José Román, Leslie Reambeault, Tammy Theis-Satterlee, Yvonne Lucia and Erika Joyner. This group of light bearers read early drafts of my project proposal, used their wisdom to guide my choice of ministerial competencies and lit my path forward.

Out of my One Spirit and Nine Gates Mystery School communities came twelve prayer warriors who participated in my "Pray Like The Poets" workshop. The following brave souls joined me live every week for eight weeks to explore and pray with me: Kia Abalay, Nathan Brisby, Susan Cergol, Diana Copoloff, Erika Joyner, Lyn Liston, Sarah Matteo, Shirley Morey, Tracy Robinson, Mark Salmanson, and Tammy Theis-Satterlee. And thank you to Kathleen Koprowski who watched all eight weeks of videos and

provided me valuable and constructive feedback on the class content and my delivery. There would have been no project without this beautiful collective.

A deep bow of gratitude to Deborah Jones and Pádraig Ó Tuama who taught weeks five and six of the workshop and exposed us to prayer through two different and more experienced lenses. I was blessed to have these two amazing individuals participate in my workshop.

Thank you to NYTS for the courage to maintain a multi-faith cohort within the DMin program. The world needs more open minded and open-hearted seminaries that aren't afraid to blur or even erase the lines that divide and that care more about shining a light on our unique expressions of faith than trying to make us conform to one model.

Thank you to Dr. Dale Irvin, Dr. Ava Carroll and Dr. Keith Russell for reading and commenting on multiple drafts of the proposal and dissertation. Dr. Carroll, bless her heart, had to deal with all our energies and anxieties during that first year when it felt like "deer in the headlights" at every turn for us. An extra thank you to Dr. Russell for not only serving as my advisor, but for throwing me the life raft I needed when I wanted to quit in the second week of the program. Dr. Russell seemed to understand what I was struggling with and how I could turn my personal struggle into something that would help others before I was even clear on what I was doing. Thank you all for your clarity and support.

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I am forever indebted to One Spirit Learning Alliance and Nine Gates Mystery School. Their programs continue to feed my soul and teach me the deep wisdom that is an interspiritual life . I am proud to claim them as my lineage and it is through these two stellar, heart-based organizations that I met some of my nearest and dearest friends. I am so grateful for the opportunities to return in service.

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Without my family, I would not be here in this place in my magical life. My parents, Lucie and Khalaf, my sister, Amal, my children and their spouses, Joseph and Judy, Frances and Dwayne, Jibril, and Amir and Kristen (always listed in that order) and my grand girls, Nyla, Dahlia, Solani, and Khari. I was taught years ago that our actions in the present impact seven generations forward and back. I believe this to be true and continue on my path in hopes of contributing positively to this sacred line of which I am blessed to be a part.

Finally, to the Holy... the Mystery... the Grace that breathed me into existence, with humility and awe, thank you.

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CHAPTER 1
O MY LORD, I AM NOT ELOQUENT

"Most days I forget that I'm an ordained Interfaith Minister." That was the first sentence of my first assignment at NYTS in October 2017. One reason for that sentiment was that I did not feel confident or competent praying out loud. Extemporaneous prayer seemed like something that someone who had gone to seminary and had been ordained should be able to do with ease. In my case, when people asked if I could say grace or a blessing, my response was consistently, "that's not really my thing." It was awkward and embarrassing and I did not feel I had the right to call myself a minister.

Learning to pray out loud easefully, however, was not why I decided to pursue a DMin at NYTS. I had not been thinking about that particular deficit in my ministerial skillset when the idea bubbled to the surface in the spring of 2016. I came to this program, so I thought, because it was the next logical step on my journey and to remind myself that while I do not lead a church, I am an Interfaith/Interspiritual minister.

I originally ventured down the advanced degree path in 2010 when I started an application for a doctorate in organizational change management. At that point I had been in the corporate world for 14 years and had completed my MBA. Fate had another idea, however. By the summer of 2010, I had already experienced to varying degrees Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, and then yoga found me. I was enchanted by it all; philosophy, Ayurveda (an ancient holistic sister science), pranayama (awareness of the breath), asana (movement), sangha (community), and kirtan (devotional chant). The

studio I attended had a spiritual foundation. Later I would come to know this as Bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion. I poured myself into the study of the expression of the Divine through the pantheon of Hindu deities and put my pursuit of a doctorate on the back burner.

Yoga led to weekend workshops, travel abroad with and without yoga as the backdrop, a silent Buddhist retreat, deeper exploration of Shamanism, study of the Divine Feminine, Reiki certification, and more. My spiritual journey was finally on a paved road with signage instead of the unmarked, dimly lit forest trails I had been trudging for years. I was on solid ground, trying this and that, following the scenic route and relishing the adventure and freedom of it all. Yet, something from my childhood was still pulling at me. So, after returning from a volunteer trip to Uganda in 2012, I gathered my courage and applied to a small interfaith seminary located in New York City. Seminary provided a map for my journey and served as a container for my experiences to that point. It turned out my spiritual path had a name, Interfaith. In 2013, I transferred to One Spirit Interfaith Seminary and found my permanent home. I was ordained in 2014 and remained at One Spirit Learning Alliance for two more years to attend the Interspiritual Counseling program (ISC), while continuing to study different expressions of Spirit and do my corporate thing—organizational restructurings, new managers, new projects and responsibilities, the usual highs and lows.

I had been doing both for years—working in a high pressure, high tech corporate environment and walking the spiritual path—thriving in both, equally. I was a "householder" as they say in India. The crazy thing was that as I became more comfortable seeing myself as a spiritual seeker, the more I saw expressions of Spirit all

around me in the corporate environment. I began to take notice of colleagues who talked about God or claimed nature as their spiritual home and co-workers began talking with me about their spiritual practices; how they follow the Buddhist path or maintain the puja for their community (in Texas!). It really struck me when a Muslim coworker declined all Friday noon meeting invites because that was unapologetically his time of prayer and a Jewish colleague did the same for all calls scheduled after sundown on Fridays. Sometimes, the presence of Source was subtler, like when someone got emotional talking about their children or aging parents. I began to see that my corporate job and environment could be the setting for my ministry—holding space for those sacred connections and exchanges of kindness in what some consider an unsafe environment.

That feeling/knowledge was amplified when I heard "spiritual" teachings coming from non-spiritually identified individuals who were directing their messages to those of us in corporate America. Simon Sinek was the first to get my attention with his groundbreaking video, "Why Leaders Eat Last."[2] Then I found Ted Talks! Once my eyes were opened, I saw spiritual inspiration for the workplace everywhere.

When it felt time to revisit the idea of getting a doctorate, I knew I needed a program where I could explore spirituality while remaining in corporate America. That was my life and what I knew; what I referred to as my "stealth ministry." There was a time when being a spiritual seeker or working for corporate America were mutually exclusive. That was not my situation and I found myself participating in and telling a new story.

[2] Simon Sinek, "Why Leaders Eat Last," YouTube Flash Video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReRcHdeUG9Y (accessed September 30, 2017).

I heard from my friend and One Spirit classmate, José Román, that NYTS could accommodate my non-traditional ministry. At the time, he was completing his doctorate at NYTS and it turned out to be the alma mater of many One Spirit graduates who went on to complete doctorates. The following paragraph from the NYTS homepage still reads like a personal invitation:

> New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) has long been recognized for its innovative programs, its pioneering spirit, and its commitment to training women and men for ministry in the real world. For more than a century we have been offering theological education that is accessible, inclusive and transformative. We believe that God calls people from all walks of life and that each person has a unique ministry to fulfill. Our task is to help each one discover what that means for you, and to help you prepare for the next stage of your exciting journey of faith.[3]

When my DMin journey officially began on Monday, October 2, 2017, I was toying with the idea of developing a resource (book or website) for ministers who, like me, felt called to remain in their corporate gigs after ordination; there were quite a few of us at the One Spirit homecoming in August 2017.

I started the program thinking it was going to be an intellectual experience that would not shake up my world too much, in spite of the fact that during our first week, we started and ended each day with someone being asked to pray. I discovered quickly that my mantra and practice of "don't make eye contact" was not going to work in a cohort of eight. Truthfully, I was so inspired by what I heard from my classmates and teachers, I really wanted to get past my fears to be able to comfortably and authentically pray out loud. Keith Russell was my greatest inspiration. He managed to sound like Tony Robbins and a Baptist preacher at the same time; moving me deeply without relying on

[3] New York Theological Seminary, "Welcome to New York Theological Seminary," https://main.nyts.edu/welcome-to-new-york-theological-seminary/ (accessed July 1, 2019).

traditionally religious words. By the end of the first residential, my DMin project morphed into a workshop for kindred spirits who wanted to learn to pray out loud with integrity, while using language that was authentic. Richard Bach, the American novelist, wrote, "We teach best what we most need to learn."[4] I felt driven and terrified.

This was not the first time I was trying to make peace with spoken prayer. In April 2014, when I was a seminary student, I wrote a worship service around the topic and I titled it, "Why Not Ask for Help?" with an inspirational talk that I called, "Pray? Who me?" (see Appendix B: Inspirational Talk). I never had the opportunity to give the talk, but with each reading, I am taken back to that time and my feelings around prayer. Not much had changed when I started my DMin. This was uncomfortably familiar territory and I was more than a little reluctant to venture forth.

I started telling people about my insecurities and project idea and more often than not, they shared they had the same anxiety. Who knew? My project idea, a workshop on the art of spoken prayer, was actually viable. It was during one of those conversations that the title revealed itself. I was telling my friend Charlie about the anxiety I felt when people asked me to pray out loud and my intentions for my demonstration project, and I said to him, "I want to be able to pray like the poets." The name stuck. Since poetry is the language of the soul, it made intuitive sense that (a) it described the eloquence that I wanted to achieve and (b) it was another door into the world of prayer, especially for those of us challenged by the word prayer, its traditional connotations, and/or the traditional language associated with spoken prayer.

[4] Richard David Bach, *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah* (New York: Random House, 1977), 47.

Before I could teach or help others, however, I had to help myself. I was terrified of humiliating myself at my workshop because I was neither a poet nor someone who prayed out loud. When I looked at my own anxiety and fears, I knew that simply forcing myself to pray out loud and publicly was not going to make me more comfortable doing it. At the same time, to get more comfortable praying (out loud or silently), one must pray. As Henri Nouwen is quoted, "The only way to pray is to pray, and the way to pray well is to pray much."[5]

I spent the next fifteen months experimenting on myself, applying different theories and practices, in no specific order; coming at the problem from different angles. I did not know if my dread around spontaneous spoken prayer came from my trouble with traditional language, having not grown up in a household that prayed out loud, performance anxiety, deep emotional wounds, some combination of those items or something still hidden and unknown to me. I also did not know if spending any time looking for the source was a worthwhile use of my energy. Looking back, I see now that I forged ahead trying to address all my theories on the source of my "condition."

The issue of language seemed like the easiest to tackle. I knew I needed prayerful options beyond the Book of Common Prayer from my childhood.[6] I had moved away from traditional religion and while I was still interested in having a relationship with a power greater than myself (even if it resided within myself), I did not have the language for it. I started collecting books of poetry and prayers written by those who understood

[5] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 117. Nouwen was an internationally renowned priest and author, respected professor and beloved pastor. He wrote 39 books on the spiritual life.

[6] In the spirit of not throwing out the baby with the bathwater, I did purchase a copy for my research, just in case.

that prayer was much more than one thing and expressions of the Mystery were not limited to *God the Father*. Celeste Yacobini's artfully curated collection of responses to the question, "How do You Pray?" was a nice addition to my library. Even though my project was narrowly focused on extemporaneous spoken prayer, I was inspired by the heartfelt responses from contemporary wise souls from across traditions. All this was helpful and a good starting point. By itself, not enough.

At Christ Episcopal Church in Belleville, NJ, where I attended services regularly for most of my childhood, there was no spontaneous or improvised prayer. There was also no spontaneous prayer at home and certainly not in school. While trying to overcome my struggle, I thought perhaps I simply had a gap in my knowledge. I bought "how to" books on poetry and prayer. Applicable ones were harder to find, since the prayer market is generally directed to Christians, but I found some gems like, Marcus Braybrooke's, *Learn to Pray: A Practical Guide to Faith and Inspiration*, Erik Wikstrom's, *Simply Pray: Modern Spiritual Practice to Deepen Your Life*, and a favorite, Ann Lamott's, *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*. Mary Oliver wrote a very helpful book on the mechanics of poetry entitled, *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry*. I already had it in my head that the workshop would involve reading poems, prayers and prose written by others before we ventured into writing or speaking our own, since that was what I was doing myself, and Oliver validated that approach for me. "Before we can be poets, we must practice; imitation is a very good way of investigating the real thing."[7]

[7] Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1994), 13.

On the topic of books, I must highlight Stanley Hauerwas' *Prayers Plainly Spoken*. This small book was written when Hauerwas was teaching Christian Ethics at Duke University's Divinity School. He wrote in his introduction, "Even after I had gone to seminary and later finished a Ph.D. in theology, I could not pray off-the-cuff."[8] He goes on to write, "God does not want us to come to the altar different from how we live the rest of our lives."[9] He also wrote, "I could not pray differently than I speak"[10] and "… nothing is more eloquent than simplicity."[11] The following sentence felt like it was written just for me for this project, "I do not have the gifts or skills of the poet, but I am sure that prayer rightly forces us to discover speech otherwise undiscoverable." I was floored!

The book itself is a collection of prayers that he wrote and used at the start of each class. He had never prayed before class until his wife asked him why. Without a good answer for her, he "resolved to do so even though I did not like it."[12] His process involved writing a prayer each morning before going to school. The prayers are authentic and in his own words, not lofty or holy sounding. His story and book title dropped right into my being; simplicity became my mantra and I felt some of the fear dissipate just in response to that word. I also realized that it was acceptable to show up prepared; seemed so obvious in hindsight. Going into the next NYTS residential week, I brought a prayer with me from Hauerwas' book. I was making progress and there was more work to do.

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[8] Stanley Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 12.

[9] Ibid., 14.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

I still believed that perhaps my anxiety was performance related, so I attended Bobby McFerrin's CircleSongs workshop at Omega Institute[13] and one month later had a private lesson with one of the teachers from his team, Judi Vinar. [14] My thinking was, as improvised song or prayer both felt equally threatening, to try to conquer the anxiety associated with improvisational singing as a door in (or out depending on your perspective). Judi is brilliant, kind and thoughtful, and yet, after one lesson, I felt too overwhelmed and quit.

Alongside all this effort, I still questioned if I was so deeply wounded that I would never overcome the anxiety that was induced when asked to spontaneously pray out loud. To address that notion, I attended healing workshops with Rob Wergin[15] at NY Open Center and participated in Esoteric School.[16]

All these activities were not linear, of course, and throughout this period, I was journaling, meditating, reading poetry and prose, and writing prayers and poetry. I also worked with my spiritual teacher and friend, Deborah Jones, Executive Director of Nine Gates Mystery School.[17] Using conversation and meditation, she taught me so many valuable lessons. The one most relevant to this project: I experienced a felt sense that the

[13] This improvisational vocal workshop is offered every August at Omega Institute.

[14] Judi is a gifted voice teacher and exceptionally talented. See her website at, www.judivinar.com/.

[15] In addition to his workshops, I listened to Rob's recordings while I slept. See www.robwergin.com for specifics around Rob's powerful and unique work.

[16] Esoteric School is a residential intensive for Nine Gates Mystery School graduates. While there were no formal healing work or prayers at Esoteric School, Deborah Jones taught me that "it's all one thing."

[17] I am forever indebted to Deborah and Nine Gates. I encourage any serious seeker to consider Mystery School. See www.ninegates.org for details.

words I was looking for were *in here* and not *out there*.[18] During the stillness of my morning meditation, I would drop into my heart and practice forming prayers. Initially they disappeared when I opened my eyes to write them down, but at least I was making some progress because they felt sweet to me while I had them. In time, I was able to write prayers/poems that also sounded sweet to my ears.

I cannot say whether it was my persistence or grace, but things were shifting. I was able to mine my inner world and lovingly shine a light on my past wounds. I made peace with some of them and that freed me up to move forward. I was making progress, little by little. I felt supported by my community of friends and family, my ever-growing library, and my spiritual practices that were softening the edges of the fear/terror and helping me to access my prayerful voice. In the middle of this evolutionary process, I applied for a dean's position at One Spirit Interfaith Seminary. The Universe gifted me with more than I had hoped when they offered me a position with the second year of the program. The second year is entitled, "The Practice of Interfaith/Interspiritual Ministry—The Path of Skillful Service."[19]

In the second year, among other things, students are required to write rituals and ceremonies and are provided experiential teachings on prayer. I had been given the gift of being able to sit in the student seat once more during class weekends. This was also a community that prayed together each month when we gathered. "The only way to pray is

[18] My favorite and most powerful Deborah quote is, "we have all the time we need." I used that often when I taught my workshop. We never felt rushed and always started and ended exactly on time.

[19] One Spirit Learning Alliance, "Curriculum," www.onespiritinterfaith.org/our-programs/seminary/curriculum/ (accessed July 4, 2019).

to pray, and the way to pray well is to pray much." Life felt magical and I had yet to write and deliver my workshop.

In the chapters that follow, I invite you to join me on the journey from project inception to fruition with a peek into the future. In Chapter Two, I introduce you to my people, the "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR). SBNR serves as an outward expression of my inner world. My project first took place in my inner state before being offered as an online/interactive workshop, leveraging Zoom video conferencing technology. SBNR is a community that is not a community; that is worth exploring.

Chapter Three revisits my challenge statement and provides statistical evidence to support my anecdotal evidence that I am not alone in my anxiety about extemporaneous spoken prayer.

Chapter Four contains my three research questions. I think of spoken, spontaneous prayer like jazz music. Before one can improvise or bend the rules, one must learn them. In that regard, it was important to first research scriptural, cornerstone prayers from five contemporary faith traditions to understand their context and use. I intentionally chose prayers that are spoken in community. For my second research question, I discuss the topic of the language of prayer, specifically, if prayer requires a special language. My third research question covers the pedagogy of spoken prayer.

In Chapter Five, I elaborate on how my own process contributed to and informed the curriculum of the "Pray Like The Poets" workshop. Here, I also revisit my project goals and strategies from my Proposal.

In Chapter Six, I share my personal evolution as it relates to the ministerial competencies my site team and I agreed upon at the start of this journey.

Finally, Chapter Seven will give us a glimpse into the future, which, from where I stand today, appears to be filled with more easeful and, sometimes, even eloquent, prayers.

CHAPTER 2
MY PEOPLE: SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS

A traditional DMin project usually has a physical setting; often a congregation or institution where the transformative work takes place. My project was designed around my own desire to be comfortable praying out loud, with eloquence as an added bonus, the intention being that if I could create a program that helps me, I could then build a workshop I could offer to help others. Technically, my setting is my inner milieu. With that as my backdrop, I looked for an external representation of my inner world and found it in the "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) movement. I identified with the expression, "spiritual but not religious," from the first time I heard it. The deeper I went into the research, the more I would claim it as my own. I had found *my people*.

SBNR is a label used to identify the ever-growing population of Americans who distinguish spirituality from religion and often also carry negative feelings toward religious institutions (namely the church). Other, lesser used labels include unchurched, unaffiliated, "spiritual and secular" and nones. The movement itself is not unified and as such there is no ministry or mission, creed or dogma.

History

Sven Erlandson was the first to coin the phrase and publish a book about the "spiritual but not religious" movement. His book, *Spiritual but Not Religious: A Call to Religious Revolution in America,* was released in 2000. His premise is that the SBNR phenomena is the result of the American movements of individualism, deconstruction,

and anti-establishmentarianism which "culminated in the 1960s and '70s when nearly an entire generation left the church."[20] In 2001, on the heels of Erlandson's book, Robert C. Fuller released *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. Fuller posits that those who "describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' are heirs of a historical and philosophical lineage that goes back as far as the colonial era."[21]

Jeff Carreira, author and mystical philosopher, writes that the SBNR "trend" has its roots in the secularization process that began with the Enlightenment.[22] He credits the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and William James (1842-1910) for inspiring the creation of the New Thought Churches in America as well as the hybrid "East meets West" spirituality that started in the 1950s and '60s[23] (and is commonplace today).

Early books and articles present it as a movement that grew out of disenchantment with traditional Christian religious structures. While this may have been true in the past, Linda Mercadante discovered, while researching her latest book, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*, published in 2014, that this is one more myth surrounding present day SBNR. She goes on to call SBNR a new morality and

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[20] Sven Erlandson, *Spiritual but Not Religious: A Call to Religious Revolution in America* (San Jose, CA: Writer's Showcase, 2000), 3.

[21] Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10.

[22] See *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (https://www.iep.utm.edu/amer-enl/): "Although there is no consensus about the exact span of time that corresponds to the American Enlightenment, it is safe to say that it occurred during the eighteenth century among thinkers in British North America and the early United States and was inspired by the ideas of the British and French Enlightenments. Based on the metaphor of bringing light to the Dark Age, the Age of the Enlightenment (Siècle des Lumières in French and Aufklärung in German) shifted allegiances away from absolute authority, whether religious or political, to more skeptical and optimistic attitudes about human nature, religion and politics."

[23] Jeff Carreira, "Ralph Waldo Emerson and The Origins of the Spiritual but Not Religious," https://jeffcarreira.com/ralph-waldo-emerson-origins-spiritual-not-religious/ (accessed March 11, 2018).

possibly the "most dramatic religious, intellectual and social change since Christendom took root in Europe."[24] The SBNR classification is no longer limited to disenchanted Christians and now includes people from all (and no) faith traditions.

As the movement has evolved, the greatest change over the last twenty years is the attention the movement is getting from the outside: measuring and polling by groups—like Pew Research and PRRI—books and articles written for and against the movement, acknowledgment that the numbers are significant enough to view this group as a voting bloc, and the growing number of religiously unaffiliated organizations and centers that have opened to support the community's desire for spiritual exploration.

Ethos

According to Mercadante, the core belief of individuals who identify as SBNR is that spirituality is personal, private, open, individualistic and core.[25] The ethos of the movement "rejects or minimizes organized religion, insists all religions are the same or equally limited, minimizes belief or practices 'hybridity,' highly individualistic, often non-theistic, experiments with monism, pantheism, paganism, dualism."[26] This is consistent with the findings of Erlandson and Fuller.

Many individuals who identify as SBNR would describe themselves as seekers. According to D. Patrick Miller, seeker and author, the greatest theological shift is one from God "out there" to God "in here." Likely, as a result of the influence of Eastern

[24] Linda Mercadante, "Understanding the Spiritual but not Religious," https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/spiritual_not_religious.pdf, 43 (accessed March 4, 2018).

[25] Ibid., 34.

[26] Ibid., 8.

traditions, the SBNR community generally believes in a God within—representing the greatest human potential available to us all.[27]

However, there is no universally embraced concept or definition of God or the nature of the Divine for those who self-identify as SBNR. One reason for the growth of the movement is that issues of theology are not debated—there is no right vs. wrong. According to Mercadante, regarding the topic of belief, the key is what they don't believe. She discovered that there is opposition to certain concepts associated with Christianity and other organized religions: exclusivism; truth; personal, self-conscious, intentional, involved, God; sin; and communal approach to spiritual growth.[28] The beliefs of SBNR are varied and combined in different ways for different people. Some believe in God and others believe in a "universal energy source."[29] Some believe that we are all one and others believe we're on our own or on par with nature. Some believe that we are energy beings having a human experience. These beliefs are not mutually exclusive—each person is free to customize their belief system and change it over time. In addition, there is a respect for mythology and a metaphorical approach to the Bible and other traditional sacred texts.

Programs

Individuals self-identify as SBNR and embrace practices/programs they feel enrich their spiritual lives; sometimes in community and sometimes through solitary endeavors. For many who identify as SBNR, spirituality can be found in all things and

[27] D. Patrick Miller, "The Rapid Dying of Religion and the Rise of a Universal Spirituality," http://www.fearlessbooks.com/ReligionDying.htm (accessed March 17, 2018).

[28] Mercadante, 35.

[29] Ibid., 41.

events/programs can range from silent meditation to movement and dance, to chant, reading from a variety of scriptures, a lecture on quantum physics, or a trip through ancient ruins. Anything that speaks to the soul qualifies.

According to Siobhan Chandler, a Victoria, Canada-based sociologist of religion, "The Spiritual But Not Religious movement is driven by individualism, itself a product of an educated, socially progressive society that places a high value on freedom and choice."[30]

In my experience, there are three categories of programs that speak to and support the SBNR movement. The first classification of programs is intended to help people access their spirituality; these programs are as varied as the individuals themselves. Some people access their spirituality through silence, so meditation retreats are appealing; silent retreats can be found at monasteries, temples, retreat centers, or spiritual centers. Others feel called to sing or chant—Bhakti festivals are very popular with several annual festivals around the country drawing thousands of people each year. All expressions of art are considered spiritual and it is not uncommon to find writing, painting or dance classes geared toward soul work or spiritual expression. Yoga is also a popular way for people who identify as SBNR to connect with spirituality and community through movement, meditation and/or breathwork. Not all yoga is spiritually oriented, however, so if one is seeking spirituality through yoga, they will need to do some research. Accessing spirituality through knowledge is known as Jnana yoga in the Hindu tradition and speaks to the western mind—a variety of classes are available at adult schools,

[30] Quoted in Katherine Gougeon, "The New New Age: "Spiritual But Not Religious," *Fashion Magazine*, December 2017, https://fashionmagazine.com/lifestyle/spiritual-but-not-religious/.

traditional learning environments, spiritual centers, and online. The Internet has contributed tremendously to the SBNR movement by removing barriers of education and community for those seeking spiritual education and community outside organized religion.

The second category of programs is action-based. Spiritual/sacred activism is not new—the abolitionists, suffragettes and civil rights workers were all spiritually grounded individuals who believed a different reality was necessary and possible. Today, spiritual or sacred activism is a way for people who identify as SBNR to unify for a change without joining a religious organization. The Network of Spiritual Progressives, based in Berkeley, CA, with one hundred chapters around the US, is one such organization that is geared toward people who want to participate in "calling forth the dream of the world we want."[31] The Network of Spiritual Progressives defines spiritual activism as "working to create a loving, just, sacred, and sustainable world through means that are also loving, just, sacred, and sustainable. A spiritual activist practices empathy in word and deed as a way to build beloved communities and transform consciousness."[32] Another action-based organization that I am familiar with is One Spirit in Action; the global service action arm of One Spirit Learning Alliance in New York City. These are just two examples of non-religious based organizations that embody the spirit of service.

[31] Network of Spiritual Progressives, "Who We Are," https://spiritualprogressives.org/who-we-are/ (accessed March 17, 2018).

[32] Network of Spiritual Progressives, "Spiritual Activism," https://spiritualprogressives.org/philosophy/spiritual-activism/ (accessed March 17, 2018).

The third category of programs is intended to create a sense of community. We are social creatures after all and Mercadante confirms that individuals who identify as SBNR are not loners, in spite of the fact that they generally are not joiners.[33]

There is no shortage of programs around the country; in the New York area, one can look to the Open Center, Omega Institute, One Spirit Learning Alliance or United Palace for in-person or online offerings. For online experiences, there are nearly an infinite number of podcasts to which one can subscribe, and BrightStar Events is one example of a one stop shop for mind-body events around the globe. There are also churches and religious centers that are speaking to those who identify more as spiritual than religious. In NYC, one finds examples in Marble Collegiate Church and Romemu. Follow the bouncing ball around the World Wide Web and one will discover musicians, scientists, philosophers, shamans, scholars, artists, preachers, teachers, healers and more who are speaking to the heart of the matter without attaching to dogma.

Symbols and Spaces

Symbols and images are important representations of people's beliefs. Some common images that represent spirituality without a religious affiliation include:

Other representations can include candles, incense, crystals, singing bowls of all sizes, stones, beads, items from nature, and musical instruments from around the world.

[33] Mercadante, 16, 31.

Any object or symbol that alludes to a traditional religion is generally not found in a gathering space for SBNR-type events, unless there are a variety of objects representing many traditions and belief systems (see "coexist" above)—so if there's a cross, there may also be a star of David, possibly a Celtic knot or spiral, a star and crescent representing Islam, an ohm symbol, or perhaps the tree of life, some stones, water, a feather, a native American flute or a Hindu deity. The message is one of inclusion—all are welcome. The space itself can be anything.

Outdoor spaces are often used for SBNR events and the labyrinth is a common expression of spirituality untethered to a religion. Pagan symbols and stones are often found at locations used for spiritual practices but not always. And not surprisingly, with the growing number of SBNR identified individuals, many churches, synagogues, temples and mosques host events that are open to all and are not intended to proselytize or convert.

Demographics

Historically, the SBNR movement was thought of as white, female, and Protestant. The Pew Research survey of 2017[34] shows that today, individuals who identify as SBNR come from a broader segment of America. After interviewing 5002 individuals in the US over the age of 18, it was found that 27% of those surveyed can be categorized as spiritual but not religious—up 8% from 2012. Pew Research's method involved asking respondents by phone if they consider themselves to be "a religious

[34] Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, "More Americans Now Say They're Spiritual But Not Religious," Pew Research Center FactTank, September 6, 2017, http://pewrsr.ch/2xP0Y8w (accessed March 1, 2018).

person" and whether they consider themselves to be "a spiritual person."[35] "Spiritual but not religious" is the result of these two questions—affirmative to spiritual in combination with negative to religious.

Of the 27%, 37% are religiously unaffiliated, 35% are Protestant affiliated, 14% are Catholic and 11% are members of other faiths (Judaism, Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism). Consistent with the US public overall, women make up 53% and men make up 47% of the "spiritual but not religious." This is also consistent for race/ethnicity (see chart below). They are 70% Democratic or Independent as of 2017. In addition, "spiritual but not religious" individuals are more highly educated than the general public.

Consistent with Pew findings, in 2014, Steven Barrie-Anthony wrote in *The Atlantic* that SBNR "usually do care, and deeply, about community and civic participation."[36] And while predominately Democratic or Independent, they don't vote as a single bloc tending toward the candidate who speaks to their spiritual issues—in 2016, it was Bernie Sanders. As Barrie-Anthony predicted in 2014, "Republicans are unlikely to wring much from spiritual voters; but Democrats stand to gain significantly, or lose out, depending on their ability to inspire them."[37]

[35] The methodology and survey questions can be found at http://pewrsr.ch/2xP0Y8w.

[36] Steven Barrie-Anthony, "'Spiritual but Not Religious': A Rising, Misunderstood Voting Bloc. No, They're Not Just Atheists," *The Atlantic*, January 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/01/spiritual-but-not-religious-a-rising-misunderstood-voting-bloc/283000/.

[37] Ibid.

'Spiritual but not religious' are more educated than U.S. public as a whole

	U.S. adults	Religious and spiritual	Religious but not spiritual	Spiritual but not religious	Neither religious nor spiritual
	%	%	%	%	%
Men	48	45	55	47	62
Women	52	55	45	53	38
	100	100	100	100	100
White	65	64	55	65	63
Black	12	15	11	11	6
Hispanic	16	15	29	14	18
Other/mixed	8	6	4	10	13
	100	100	100	100	100
Ages 18-29	22	15	25	22	30
30-49	34	29	29	36	36
50-64	26	31	17	30	20
65+	19	24	30	12	14
	100	100	100	100	100
High school or less	40	43	60	29	40
Some college	31	30	23	37	30
College graduate	28	27	16	34	30
	100	100	100	100	100
Rep./lean Rep.	41	44	34	30	28
Dem./lean Dem.	50	39	41	52	52
Ind./other/no lean	9	17	25	18	20
	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic. Hispanics can be of any race. Results for sex, race/ethnicity, age and education repercentaged to exclude nonresponse. Respondents were asked separate questions about whether they consider themselves to be "a religious person" and whether they consider themselves to be "a spiritual person." The "spiritual but not religious" category includes those who responded affirmatively to the question about being a spiritual person and also responded that they do not consider themselves to be a religious person.
Source: Survey conducted April 25-June 4, 2017. General public data on party affiliation from aggregated Pew Research Center surveys conducted January-April, 2017. Data on sex, race/ethnicity, age and education from 2015 American Community Survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1: Pew Research, Spiritual, but not Religions

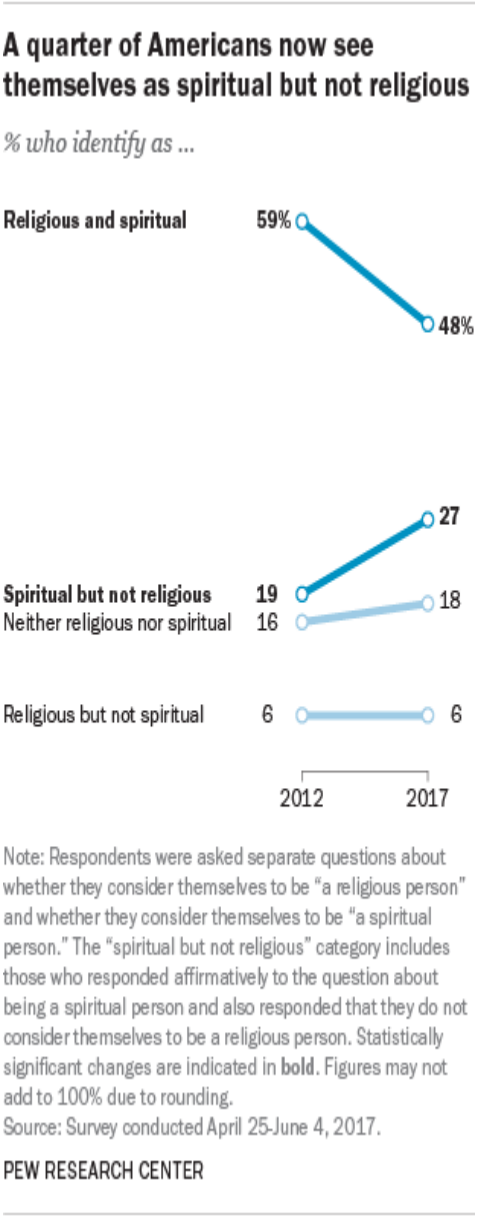
A quarter of Americans now see themselves as spiritual but not religious
% who identify as ...
Religious and spiritual
59%
48%
27
Spiritual but not religious
19
18
Neither religious nor spiritual
16
Religious but not spiritual
6
6
2012
2017
Note: Respondents were asked separate questions about whether they consider themselves to be "a religious person" and whether they consider themselves to be "a spiritual person." The "spiritual but not religious" category includes those who responded affirmatively to the question about being a spiritual person and also responded that they do not consider themselves to be a religious person. Statistically significant changes are indicated in bold. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Survey conducted April 25-June 4, 2017.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2: Pew Research, 1/4 Americans See Themselves as Spiritual

Site (for now)

While my inner world is externally represented by the SBNR movement, the actual site for my eight-week workshop on the art of spoken prayer was a virtual Zoom[38] video conference room. For a traditional action-research project, the setting and site are one and the same. As noted above, location or physical space is not necessarily what draws SBNR people together. In addition, technology has become a common vehicle for engaging and growing a community.

One Spirit Learning Alliance uses Zoom to bring students from around the world into the classroom for an interactive learning experience. Many houses of worship from all traditions now live stream their services/events and entire conferences are now offered exclusively online. An inspiring example of how technology is being used to grow a spiritual community can be found in the work of Benedictine Sister Catherine Wybourne (a/k/a Digitalnun) who provides solace and inspiration to readers of her iBenedictines.org blog and her over 15,000 Twitter followers.[39]

I chose Zoom video conferencing so that people from across the country could participate and because I wanted to develop a class that could be offered in the future in a virtual setting. I also wanted the participants to be able to see each other and me. I was not interested in a one to many or voice only model of teaching, I wanted the class to be interactive and as close to a three-dimensional experience as possible. I gave a lot of thought to *how* I would create community and safety in a virtual room. I achieved the

[38] See https://zoom.us for more information on Zoom technology.

[39] Jessica Abrahams, "Meet 'Digital Nun': The Sister Funding Her Monastery through Her Apps," telegraph.co.uk, April 5, 2015, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11511596/Meet-digital-nun-the-Sister-funding-her-monastery-through-her-apps.html.

desired effect by opening each class with a reading and the lighting of candles by the community. I also made a conscious decision that the workshop would be completely virtual as opposed to having some people gathered in a physical location, while others participated through Zoom. Fortunately, since the Zoom experience was in many ways similar to a physical gathering, future offerings of my workshop need not be limited to an online modality.

Postscript

Since the writing of this chapter, I have had the humbling experience of hearing students and faculty of One Spirit Interfaith Seminary discuss the connotations of the label, "spiritual but not religious." While it does serve as a shorthand way of describing my journey from traditional religions to an eclectic spirituality, it also linguistically embodies a rejection of religiosity that I no longer feel. As such, I am less likely to be using this descriptor going forward. And that is the beauty of the human experience—the opportunity to continuously grow and evolve.

CHAPTER 3
GNOTHI SEAUTON

According to legend, "Know Thyself" (*Gnothi Seauton*) was inscribed over the entranceway of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The desire to *know myself* is at the root of my challenge statement and the driving force behind my demonstration project. I wanted to understand my resistance/reluctance to praying out loud and publicly, and then take steps to learn the art of spoken prayer so I could more fully step into *my* expression of ministry. I went into this project thinking this was just about me.

As I shared in my introduction, I discovered pretty quickly that I was in good company. Not only did people express they had the same anxiety or fear, many of them responded with, "when you figure it out, please teach me." There was comfort in knowing my challenge was not mine alone. I once had a teacher who said if you want to know others, know yourself first.

Microcosm

I learned over the years that prayer itself takes many forms and is no longer limited to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition: "A solemn request for help, or expression of thanks addressed to God or another deity."[40] In common parlance, in today's world of spiritual seekers, prayer has come to mean any communion with the Divine, higher Self, Source, light within, Great Mystery, Oneness, etc. or any personal

[40] *Oxford English Dictio*nary, s. v. "prayer," https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/prayer (accessed April 15, 2018).

expression that connects one to an energy or feeling of being lovingly touched by something greater than oneself. This inability to nail down precise words was very much part of my challenge with prayer.

On the surface, I asked, "to whom am I praying" and "how do I address the object of my devotion?" As I shared in my introduction, *God the Father* no longer felt authentic to the woman I had become. God is no longer outside of myself, nor is this power/energy exclusively male. While my understanding of God is forever evolving, I am of the belief that everything in existence is one with the ineffable and the ineffable is one with all of existence—the ultimate paradox, both/and.

I thought language was the extent of my challenge; but it was only a portion of it. Knowing oneself requires digging beneath that which presents on the surface, which is likely a symptom of something deeper. What I learned on this journey is that my issue with prayer has many layers. I grew up in the '70s and early '80s, regularly attending an Episcopalian church until the age of 17. While my family considered themselves devotional and religious, I was not surrounded by prayer outside of church and within the church, the prayers were taken directly out of the prayer book. After my time in/with church, I practiced Islam on and off for about ten years, where prayers were generally taken from the Holy Quran. In both environments, expressions of devotion were traditional (i.e. patriarchal), subdued, and scripted. My experience at that time of my life was that prayer was an appeal for help to a (male/father) God "out there."

Another aspect of prayer from my young life that I wasn't conscious of until recently was my feeling that prayer was also an appeal to this "father God out there" to not only change our circumstances, but to change the people around us to make life easier

for us. As a teenager and young adult who did not appreciate authority figures or being told what to do, my mother's words, "I'm praying for you," were internalized to mean she wanted me to change, I was not good enough. Having raised four teenagers myself, I now understand that was not the case. As a parent, you struggle with your powerlessness to protect your children and you want and need to believe there is a power greater than yourself "out there" keeping them safe in spite of their decisions. As an adult, however, trying to understand my resistance to prayer, I realized that I viewed prayer as an imposition on one's will, a violation of one's boundaries, and/or a tool to change someone who makes your life difficult. I did not want anything to do with the word or my version of the concept. This was some of the deep wounding I mentioned earlier.

After my years with organized religion, I was exposed to and experienced the beauty and variety of faith traditions and philosophies from around the world and I came to value the many non-verbal and verbal ways to connect with Source. I attended One Spirit Interfaith Seminary to formalize my commitment to the divine source of all life and the spiritual path in a way that was aligned with the path I was already on. My hope was that I would come out on the other side at peace with the religion of my childhood and more comfortable praying. Seminary did point the way, but it was up to me to do the work and it took me four years after graduation/ordination to get to this place where I could revisit the topic. Prayer was calling me (again) and would not take no for an answer. As I learned from Joseph Campbell, the heroine's journey ultimately leads her home. She will be changed but she will return *on her own terms* (emphasis mine).

Macrocosm

In 2014, Pew Research conducted a Religious Landscape Study survey of over 35,000 adults from all 50 states about their religious affiliations, beliefs and practices,

and social and political views.[41] The data included in this chapter is drawn from the topline report[42] and the interactive links on the homepage of the study (see charts below for graphic representations of the data).

The study found that 89% of those surveyed believed in a God or a universal spirit.[43] When asked about attendance at religious services, 36% of those surveyed responded that they attend religious services at least once a week, 33% once or twice month/a few times a year, 30% attend seldom/never and 1% responded "don't know." Of the total number of respondents 52% meditate daily, weekly or monthly (45% seldom/never) and 77% pray daily, weekly, or monthly (23% seldom/never). However, regarding frequency of participation in prayer, scripture study or religious education groups, 24% attend once per week, 9% once or twice per month, 8% several times per year and 58% seldom or never.

My interpretation of those numbers is that in 2014, the majority of Americans did believe in God or a universal spirit, may or may not have been attending religious services regularly, did pray and/or meditate regularly but did not participate in a prayer group. That would also have been an accurate description of me.

[41] Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study," http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/ (accessed April 15, 2018).

[42] Pew Research Center, "2014 Religious Landscape Study (RLS-II) Topline," June 4-September 30, 2014, http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_topline.pdf (accessed April 15, 2018).

[43] The study website and links only refer to "God," however, the actual questions posed to the participants in the study also included the words "universal spirit."

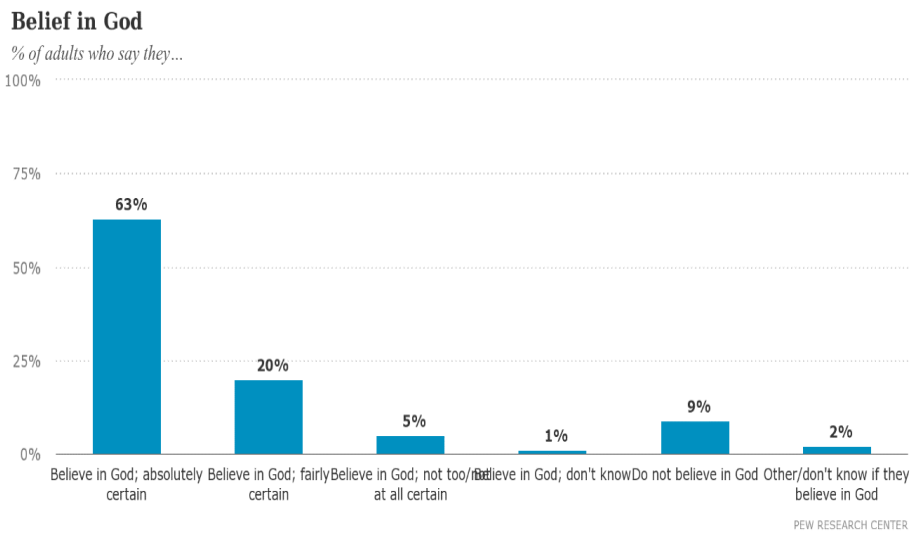

Figure 3: Pew Research Religious Landscape Study

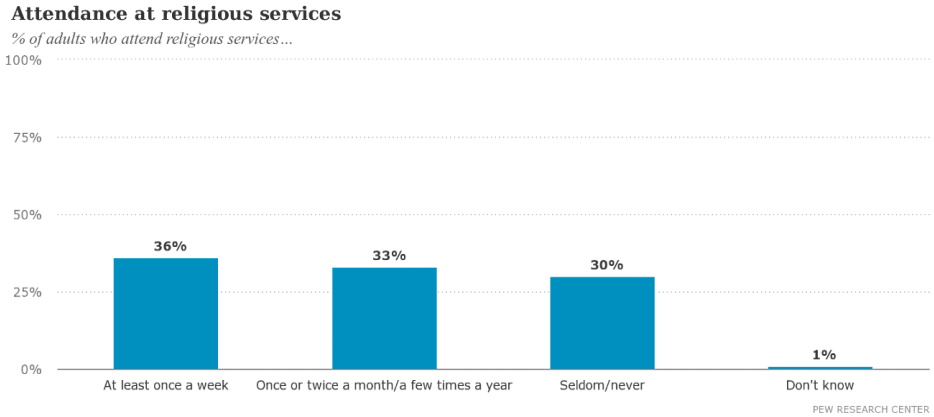

Figure 4: Pew Research Attendance at Religions Services

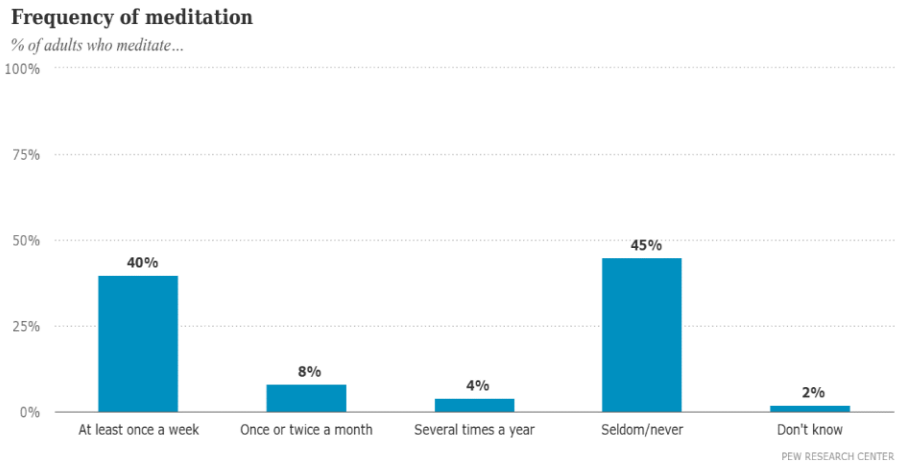

Figure 5: Pew Research Frequency of Meditation

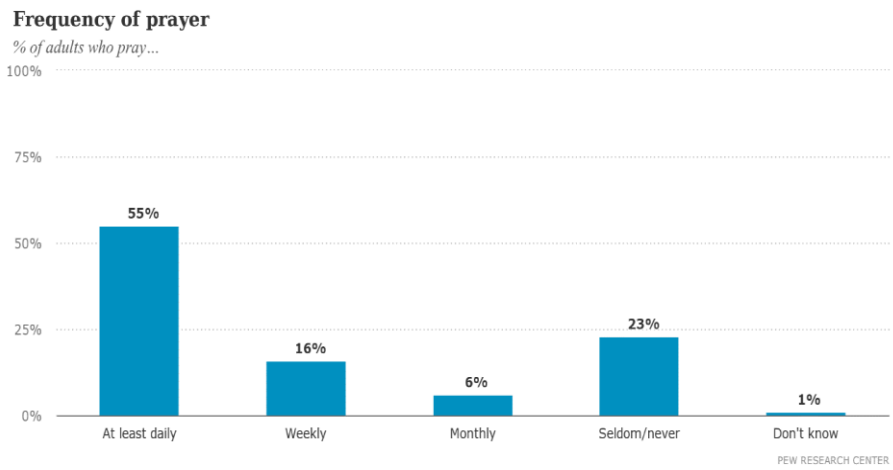

Figure 6: Pew Research Frequency of Prayer

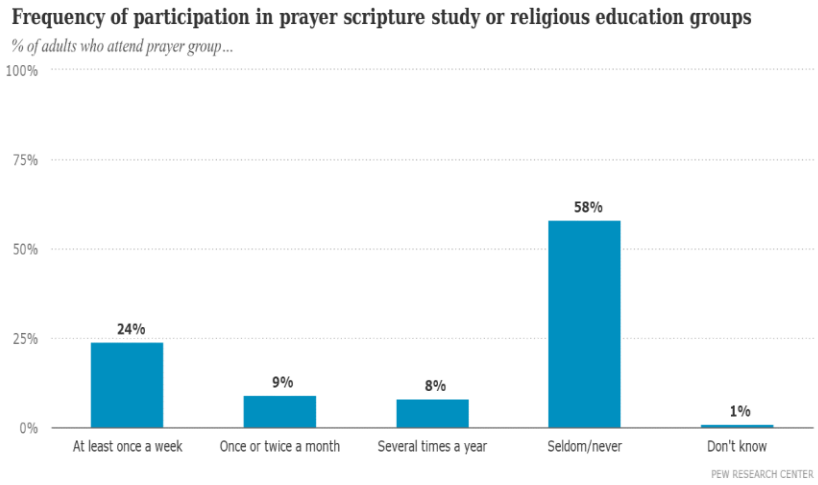

Figure 7: Pew Research Frequency of Participation in Prayer

To go more deeply into the prayer habits of Americans, I turned to Barna Group, "a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984."[44] In June 2017, Barna conducted an online survey with a nationally representative sample of 1,015 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older. The majority of respondents self-identified as Christian or past-Christian and the error rate

[44] Barna Group, https://www.barna.com (accessed April 15, 2018).

associated with a sample size of 888 interviews is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.[45]

The researchers at Barna found that 79% surveyed had prayed at least once in the past three months. That was consistent with the findings of Pew Research. What I found most interesting is that 94% of them prayed alone and 82% prayed silently (13% prayed audibly). A small percentage (4%) prayed with either another person or group or with a church. In addition, 89% of praying adults pray to "God"—Barna researchers acknowledge that "God" was not defined, 50% of the respondents pray to Jesus, and 23% pray to the Holy Spirit. The remaining percentages were allocated as shown below. Prayer in America appears to be prevalent, personal, private, and silent.

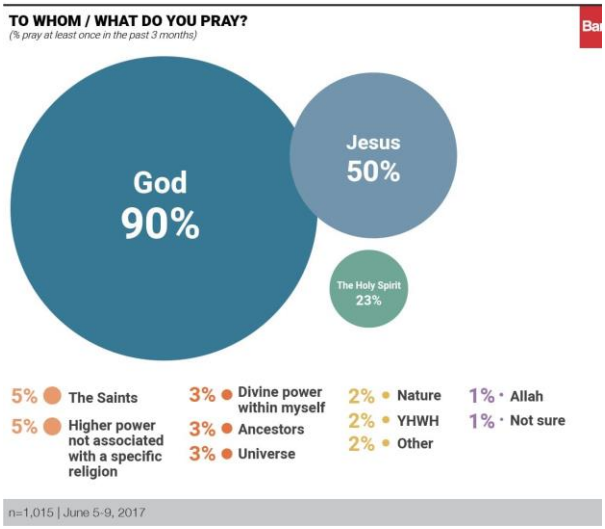

Figure 8: Barna Research, To Whom/What Do You Pray?

Conclusion

My "Pray Like the Poets: Finding Your Voice" workshop was not designed to convince anyone of the power of prayer—it is geared toward those who want to pray and

[45] Barna Group, "Silent and Solo: How Americans Pray," Research Releases in Faith & Christianity," August 15, 2017, https://www.barna.com/research/silent-solo-americans-pray/ (accessed April 15, 2018).

specifically, pray out loud at public gatherings. There are many circumstances where one might want to pray out loud and it feels that as one gets older, more circumstances arise. It is very common to pray publicly at a family meal, with loved ones in times of celebration or sorrow, with a sick friend, or simply to express gratitude in community. Ministers and spiritual counselors are routinely asked to pray at public gatherings. I have come to believe that whether one prays to God, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, Allah, YHWH, Krishna, Nature, Mother/Father God, one's own Higher Self, the Ancestors or nothing at all, prayer is powerful.

The challenge for many of us is that we do pray, but usually not in groups and not likely out loud. My research verified for me that the macrocosm and microcosm are reflections of one another, and my longing to pray publicly, in a new way and with ease, is a shared longing.

CHAPTER 4
INQUIRY

My project research grew out of my desire to better understand traditional, scriptural prayers, the language of prayer, and how experts teach prayer. I approach the topic of *prayer* directly through scriptures, abstractly through other written modalities and academically/intellectually from the perspective of educators.

Scriptural Prayers

Before we venture into speaking our own words as prayers, it would be valuable to understand the prayers that have been spoken for generations and which people of faith hold dear. What are the similarities? How do people of the different traditions speak to the source of all that is? What purpose do these prayers serve for the faithful and the community? Prayers that will be explored:

Prayer	**Source**	**Tradition**
The Shema	Torah	Judaism
The Lord's Prayer	New Testament (Matthew 6:9-13)	Christianity
Al-Fatiha	Holy Quran (Surah 1)	Islam
Gayatri Mantra	Rig Veda (Mandala 3.62.10)	Hinduism
Mantra of Compassion	Kāraṇḍavyūha sutra	Buddhism

Judaism—The Shema[46]

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

She-ma yisrael, adonai eloheinu, adonai echad

Hear O' Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

Baruch shem kavod malchuto l'olam va-ed

Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶךָ
וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לְבָבֶךָ
וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ
וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ
וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

וְהָיָה אִם־שָׁמֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם:
וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם: וְנָתַתִּי מְטַר־אַרְצְכֶם בְּעִתּוֹ יוֹרֶה וּמַלְקוֹשׁ וְאָסַפְתָּ דְגָנֶךָ וְתִירֹשְׁךָ וְיִצְהָרֶךָ: וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדְךָ לִבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ
וְשָׂבָעְתָּ: הִשָּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתֶּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסַרְתֶּם וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם: וְחָרָה אַף־יְהוָה בָּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת־
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וַאֲבַדְתֶּם מְהֵרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה נֹתֵן לָכֶם: וְשַׂמְתֶּם אֶת־
דְּבָרַי אֵלֶּה עַל־לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל־נַפְשְׁכֶם וּקְשַׁרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל־יֶדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם: וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם
לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ: וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ: לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וִימֵי
בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לַאֲבֹתֵיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil— I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the LORD's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there

[46] My Jewish Learning. "The Shema," https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-shema/ (accessed August 14, 2018).

will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the LORD is assigning to you. Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, and teach them to your children—reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up; and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates— to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וְעָשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל־כַּנְפֵי בִגְדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם וְנָתְנוּ עַל־צִיצִת הַכָּנָף פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת: וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִת וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא־תָתֻרוּ אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם זֹנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם: לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתָי וִהְיִיתֶם קְדֹשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם: אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

The LORD said to Moses as follows: Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the LORD and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. Thus, you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God. I the LORD am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I, the LORD your God.

The Shema reflects instructions delivered to the Israelites by Moses and is foundational to the daily lives of the Jewish people. It is recited twice each day, once in the morning upon rising and again before going to sleep, and is one of the first prayers taught to children. Each of the three Torah passages is directed to one aspect of the relationship between the individual and God: the first paragraph, "Hear O Israel . . . you shall love the Lord your God," is known as "accepting the yoke of the kingdom," and is a declaration of the worshiper's acceptance of God's *mitzvot*;[47] divine judgment and retribution are found in the second paragraph; and the closing third paragraph "links our

[47] Translated as "commandment," Judaism 101, www.jewfaq.org.

free acceptance of God's obligations to God's act of redemption in bringing the Jewish people out from bondage."[48]

The first verse of the Shema, from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, "Hear O' Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" is the "supreme testimony of the Jewish faith."[49] It is recited at the conclusion of Yom Kippur and traditionally as the last words before death.[50] The first line is spoken with the right hand placed over closed eyes. The practice of covering one's eyes, comes from the Talmud and is codified in Jewish law.[51] It is said that this custom enhances concentration by bringing one's attention inward and blocking out external distractions. Another explanation that is offered is that it is difficult to express complete faith in God while looking at the pain in the world around us.[52] Rabbi Yisroel Cotlar offers an additional contemplation. He writes, "Our world, and everything inside it, is created from G-d's speech at every given moment. For a few moments every morning, we close our eyes and live this reality."[53]

According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, international religious leader and philosopher, drawing from *The Idea of Nationalism*, by Hans Kohn, the ancient Greeks

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[48] John Dupuche, Fred Morgan and Fatih Tuncer, "Three Prayers in Dialogue: The Shema, the Lord's Prayer, and al- Fatiha," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 52, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 591, Academic Search Complete, *EBSCOhost* (accessed August 21, 2018).

[49] Jonathan Sacks, "Va'etchanan (5770)—The Meanings of Shema," http://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5770-vaetchanan-the-meanings-of-shema/ (accessed August 12, 2018).

[50] My Jewish Learning, "The Shema."

[51] Yisroel Cotlar, "Why Do We Cover Our Eyes for the Shema?" https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1047775/jewish/Why-Do-We-Cover-Our-Eyes-for-Shema.htm (accessed September 8, 2018).

[52] My Jewish Learning, "The Shema."

[53] Cotlar, "Why Do We Cover Our Eyes for the Shema?"

were the supreme masters of the visual arts (art, sculpture, architecture and theater), they were a culture of the eye and worshipped what they saw. In contrast, the Jews, as a profoundly religious people, worshipped what they heard. Their God, the sole object of their worship, being invisible, transcends nature and reveals Himself only in speech.[54] For that reason, the keyword of Judaism is *Shema;* God is a voice that is heard. Rabbi Sacks goes on to say that the word is untranslatable, particularly because it belongs to Biblical Hebrew and a culture of the ear.[55] Faith is a form of listening for the Jewish people.

> *Shema Yisrael* does not mean "Hear, O Israel." It means something like: Listen. Concentrate. Give the word of G-d your most focused attention. Strive to understand. Engage all your faculties, intellectual and emotional. Make His will your own. For what He commands you to do is not irrational or arbitrary but for your welfare, the welfare of your people, and ultimately the benefit of all humanity.[56]

The second line is recited in a soft voice, "Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever." The paragraph that follows, taken from Deuteronomy 6:5-9, details how the faith in one God should be lived: "Love God with all of your being, teach it to your children, recite it when you wake and lie down, bind it as a symbol on your body."[57] The section that follows is taken from Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and explains what happens when God's commandments are and are not followed. The final section comes from Numbers 15:37-41 and "concerns the biblical commandment of tzitzit, the ritual

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[54] Sacks, "Va'etchanan (5770)—The Meanings of Shema."

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] My Jewish Learning, "The Shema."

fringes that serve as a reminder of God's presence and which are worn by many Orthodox men at all times."[58]

For Fred Morgan, Professorial Fellow of the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, Australian Catholic University, the Shema is more than a prayer, it is what binds the Jewish community.

> For many Jews, the Shema also expresses the unity of the Jewish community as God's covenant people. It is seen to unite an otherwise fractious community and make of it a single people. Further, it ties us into a unity that reaches back to Mount Sinai and extends forward over millennia to the present day. As an extension of this bonding over time, the Shema can evoke feelings of return, acceptance, and "homecoming" for those who may have been estranged from their religious roots. In this way, the Shema generates a sense of theological, genealogical, sociological, and psychospiritual unity among those who recite it. It works simultaneously on several different levels to create a messianic frisson of unity in the midst of evident diversity— a thrilling anticipation of how unity and wholeness might feel.[59]

Christianity—The Lord's Prayer

> After this manner therefore pray ye:
> Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
> Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
> Give us this day our daily bread.
> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13 KJV)

The Lord's Prayer, also known as "Our Father" or "Pater Noster," is excerpted from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' first great sermon (Matthew 5-7 KJV). A similar, shorter version of the prayer is found in Luke 11:2-4.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Dupuche, Morgan and Tuncer, 591.

It is written that Jesus taught this prayer to his disciples as a way for them to communicate with God, simply, in response to the request found in Luke 11:1, "… Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." The prayer was originally spoken by Jesus in Aramaic, the language of the region at the time.[60] In the original language, its rhythm and rhyme come through clearly; it is an easily memorable prayer[61] that reflected the Jewish ideals of the time.

Jesus was a first-century Jew who, like a number of his fellow Jews, taught love of G-d and neighbor, non-violent resistance to oppression, an openness to the grandeur and the presence of G-d, and a way of seeing the world as G-d would like it rather than as humanity had made it.[62]

The Lord's Prayer was later translated into Greek and then English. According to the International Bible Society, the New Testament is now available in 1521 languages[63]—that represents the present-day reach of the Lord's Prayer in the global Christian community.

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[60] Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 2.

[61] Rowan Williams, "The Lord's Prayer," http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/prayer/lordsprayer_1.shtml (accessed August 22, 2018).

[62] Caren Goldman, "Amy-Jill Levine: Author of The Misunderstood Jew," http://www.explorefaith.org/resources/books/author_interviews/an_interview_with_amy-jill_levine.php (accessed September 8, 2018).

[63] International Bible Society, https://www.biblica.com (accessed September 8, 2018).

What makes it unique is that it starts simply with the personal and intimate address, "Our Father."[64] The entire prayer moves forward from the starting point that the followers of Jesus are all the children of (our) God.[65]

The Lord's Prayer is memorized by all Christian children and can be recited by adults with little prompting, even those who no longer refer to themselves as Christian. The Lord's Prayer is recited from baptism to funeral—it follows a Christian throughout his/her lifetime. In addition, in the Catholic tradition, the Lord's Prayer is recited three times each day. "…it's meant to be transmitted, it's meant to be passed on, learned and taught."[66] John Dupuche, calls it, "the supreme Christian prayer that Christians recite together."[67]

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote: "If somebody said, give me a summary of Christian faith on the back of an envelope, the best thing to do would be to write Our Lord's Prayer."[68]

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[64] Williams, "The Lord's Prayer."

[65] This was not a new concept, however, as Professor Amy-Jill Levine is quoted as saying, "Jews before, during and after Jesus' time often called God "Father." See "Jesus in a Jewish Context: 4-28-09," Bill's 'Faith Matters' Blog, entry posted April 28, 2009, http://billtammeus.typepad.com/my_weblog/2009/04/i-hope-you-had-a-chance-over-the-weekend-to-hear-prof-amy-jill-levine-here-in-kansas-city-talk-about-how-to-understand-jesus.html.

[66] Williams, "The Lord's Prayer."

[67] Dupuche, Morgan and Tuncer, 596 .

[68] Williams, "The Lord's Prayer."

Islam—Al-Fatiha

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ للهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمـنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهدِنَـــا الصِّرَاطَ المُستَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنعَمتَ عَلَيهِمْ غَيرِ المَغضُوبِ عَلَيهِمْ وَلاَ الضَّالِّينَ

Bismillaah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem
Al hamdu lillaahi rabbil ‘alameen
Ar-Rahman ar-Raheem Maaliki yaumid Deen
Iyyaaka na’abudu wa iyyaaka nasta’een
Ihdinas siraatal mustaqeem
Siraatal ladheena an ‘amta’ alaihim
Ghairil maghduubi’ alaihim waladaaleen
Aameen

In the Name of God, The Merciful, The Compassionate.
The Praise *belongs* to God, Lord of the worlds,
The Merciful, The Compassionate,
One Who is Sovereign of the Day of Judgment.
Thee *alone* we worship and to Thee *alone* we pray for help.
Guide us on the straight path,
the path of those to whom Thou wert gracious, not the ones against whom Thou *art* angry, nor the ones who go astray. [69]

Al-Fatiha, “the opening,” is the first of the 114 chapters of the Holy Quran. The Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad between 610 and 632 CE. *The Quran* literally means *the recitation*; according to Reza Aslan, this was a text meant to be heard, not read. It was memorized by religious scholars, referred to as the Qurra (“Quran readers”), who disseminated God’s words to the Muslim community in short bursts of prophecy.

[69] Laleh Bakhtiar, trans., *The Sublime Quran* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2012). Words in *italics* are inserted by the translator.

Except for certain important recitations that were captured on bone or scraps of leather, the Quran was not written down in Muhammad's lifetime.[70]

While the Quran is now translated[71] from the original Arabic, Al-Fatiha continues to be committed to memory by Muslims around the world in the original Arabic regardless to their mother tongue.

The first chapter of the Quran is said to open the dialogue between the believer and Allah.[72] In Islam, Allah is the name of the One, true God; Allah has no plural form nor gender. "In response, God speaks to the believer through subsequent chapters of the Qur'an."[73] Muslims are obligated to pray five times each day. For those who attend to their daily prayers, al-Fatiha is recited at least seventeen times each day.[74] Muslim scholars suggest that the reciter should stop after reading/reciting verse 5 (Thee *alone* we worship and to Thee *alone* we pray for help.), contemplate the help they are about to seek, take a new breath, and proceed to recite the remainder of the prayer.[75] For Muslims, ritual washing is required before praying and all the prayers are accompanied by a series of movements. The prayer experience unites mind, body and soul.

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[70] Reza Aslan, "How To Read the Quran: A New Translation Captures The Confusion," *Slate*, November 2008, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2008/11/how_to_read_the_quran.html (accessed September 10, 2018).

[71] Unless the original Arabic verses are embedded on the page, it cannot technically be called a Quran. See Reza Aslan.

[72] The Arabic word for "God" is "Allah."

[73] Dupuche, Morgan and Tuncer, 593.

[74] Ibid., 596.

[75] Ibid., 594.

Hinduism—Savitri Gayatri Mantra

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यम्
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्॥

OM
bhur bhuvah svah
tat savitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yo nah pracodayat

Earth Atmosphere Heaven
We meditate on the sacred light of the luminous source.
May that guide our intentions.[76]

The Savitri Gayatri mantra, more commonly known as the Gayatri mantra, consists of three lines of eight syllables; 24 syllables in total. Mantra is a Sanskrit word and is defined as, "(originally in Hinduism and Buddhism) a word or sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation" and "a Vedic hymn."[77] The Gayatri mantra is said to be the oldest and most sacred mantra in recorded history and is a hymn to Savitur, the sun god; representing both the physical sun and the Divine in all things.[78]

The Gayatri mantra is found in the sacred Hindu text, Rg Veda, verse 3.62.10. It is also mentioned in the Upanishads and Chapter 10, Verse 35 of the Bhagavad Gita.[79]

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[76] Manorama, "Gayatri Mantra: The Sacred Rhythm," https://sanskritstudies.org/gayatri-mantra-sacred-rhythm (accessed August 28, 2018).

[77] *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, s.v. "mantra," https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mantra (accessed August 28, 2018).

[78] Kelly McGonigal, "Yoga Chant to Know: Gayatri Mantra," *Yoga Journal*, December 2011, https://www.yogajournal.com/meditation/chant-to-the-sun.

[79] "Amongst the hymns in the Sāma Veda know me to be the Brihatsama; amongst poetic meters I am the Gayatri. Of the twelve months of the Hindu calendar I am Margsheersh, and of seasons I am spring, which brings forth flowers." Translation found at https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/10/verse/35.

The Gayatri is written in Sanskrit, an ancient language where each word carries its own vibration and has many layers of meaning. As a result, there are an uncountable number of translations of the Gayatri mantra. I have chosen to work with the translations of Manorama, Douglas Brooks, and Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Sai Baba).

The mantra begins with OM, the primordial sound out of which all sound emerges. The first line, bhur bhuvah svah, can be translated as "the eternal earth, air, and heaven"; these are called Vyahriti, a sacred utterance. By chanting, bhur bhuvah svah, one is preparing three aspects of oneself, the earth/physical plane, the air/inter-space, and heaven/higher plane, to receive the mantra.[80] The Savitri Gayatri starts with the second line, tat savitur varenyam, which can translate as above, "we meditate on the sacred light of the luminous source" or "That glory, that resplendence of the sun. May we contemplate the brilliance of that light."[81] The last line can be translated as "may that guide our intentions" or "may the sun inspire our minds."[82]

Sai Baba offers the following translation:

> (OM) OM (Dheemahi) We meditate (Bhargo) upon the Spiritual Effulgence (Varenyam Devasya) of THAT Adorable Supreme Divine Reality (Savitur) the Source (Bhur, Bhuva, Svaha) of the Physical, the Astral and the Heavenly Spheres of Existence. (TAT) May THAT Supreme Divine Being (Prachodayat) enlighten (Yo) which (Nah) our (Dhi Yo) intellect (so that we may realise the Supreme Truth). Also: Dhi Yo YoNah Prachodayat = Awaken my Discrimination, O Lord and guide me. [83]

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[80] Manorama, "Gayatri Mantra: The Sacred Rhythm."

[81] Kelly McGonigal, "Yoga Chant to Know: Gayatri Mantra."

[82] Ibid.

[83] "The Power and Potency of the Gayatri Mantra as Taught and Expounded by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba," (Sri Lanka: The Sri Sathya Sai Organization, 1996), http://lakshminarayanlenasia.com/articles/The-Power-and-Potency-of-Gayatri-Mantra.pdf (accessed June 22, 2019).

While the Gayatri is most often referred to as mantra, according to Sai Baba, "The Mantra has all the three elements that figure in the adoration of God—Praise, Meditation and Prayer."[84] He writes that the first part of the mantra/prayer, the first nine words, serves to praise the divine: OM BHUR BHUVA SVAHA TAT SAVITUR VARENYAM BHARGO DEVASYA. DHEEMAHI provides the second element, reverent meditation upon the Divine, and the third element, prayer, is in the words DHI YO YONAH PRACHODAYAT, which can be interpreted as a prayer for guidance and awakening.

The Gayatri has the same role in the lives of Hindus as does the Lord's Prayer in the lives of Christians. It is taught to children from a young age, is chanted and sung around the world in the original Sanskrit and is recited hundreds of times each day as a part of daily rituals.

According to Brooks, chanting the mantra serves three purposes: giving back to the sun (source of life), seeking wisdom and enlightenment, and expressing gratitude. He calls it, "an ecstatic poetic moment." [85] Sai Baba calls it, "the Essence of the Teaching of the Vedas - the Veda Sara."[86]

Buddhism—Mantra of Compassion

ॐ मणिपद्मे हूं

Auṃ maṇi padme hūṃ

Hail, the jewel in the lotus

[84] Ibid.

[85] McGonigal, "Yoga Chant to Know."

[86] "The Power and Potency of the Gayatri Mantra."

It is worth remembering that Buddhism is not a religion in the traditional sense in that there is no deity. Many people think of Buddhism as a philosophy or way of life. Gary Gach, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Buddhism,* writes, "In the East, *BuddhaDharma* is the commonplace expression: an awakened way of living with What Is. An art of true happiness. As simple as opening your hand … or heart."[87]

Across the different schools of Buddhism, some consider their devotional meditation and chanting practices "prayer" while others do not. Theraveda Buddhists pray without the expectation of anyone listening and Mahayana and tantric Buddhists pray to buddhas and bodhisattvas (not necessarily literal beings).[88]

In researching Buddhist scriptural "prayer," I was unable to find one prayer or mantra that stood out as a representation of the faith, as The Shema, Lord's Prayer, Al-Fatiha and the Gayatri Mantra do for Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. So, I turned to my own experience.

In 2008, a tour of Buddhist sacred sites in India was arranged for myself and two friends. We spent the first several days at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Mundgod, India (approximately 400km north of Bangalore and 600km south of Mumbai). "Tibetan Buddhism combines the essential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism with Tantric and Shamanic, and material from an ancient Tibetan religion called Bon."[89] During our time

[87] Gary Gach, "Is Buddhism a Religion?," PBS.org blog posted May 2010, http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/blog/2010/may/6/buddhism-religion-gary-gach/ (accessed September 5, 2018).

[88] Sam Littlefair, "Do Buddhists Pray? What For?," *Lion's Roar,* June 2017, https://www.lionsroar.com/what-is-prayer-in-buddhism/.

[89] BBC, "Tibetan Buddhism," http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/subdivisions/tibetan_1.shtml (accessed August 3, 2019).

there, we were schooled in the daily practices of monastic life and at the end of our stay, were rewarded with a meeting with the elder Rinpoche.[90] His blessing/gift to us was the Sanskrit mantra of compassion: Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ.

Also known as "Mani" or "Six Syllables," this mantra is associated with the four-armed Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. It is considered by many to be the most sacred mantra in Tibetan Buddhism and first appears in the Mahayana Kāraṇḍavyūha sutra.[91]

According to Dilgo Khyentse, Rinpoche and head of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism from 1987 to 1991:

> The mantra Om Mani Pädme Hum is easy to say yet quite powerful, because it contains the essence of the entire teaching. When you say the first syllable Om it is blessed to help you achieve perfection in the practice of generosity, Ma helps perfect the practice of pure ethics, and Ni helps achieve perfection in the practice of tolerance and patience. Pä, the fourth syllable, helps to achieve perfection of perseverance, Me helps achieve perfection in the practice of concentration, and the final sixth syllable Hum helps achieve perfection in the practice of wisdom.[92]

His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, provides the following interpretation of the mantra in his lecture and YouTube video:[93] Om (also AUM) represents the practitioner's impure body, mind and speech along with the pure body, mind and speech of a Buddha. The four syllables found in "Mani Padme" are the path by which one transforms impure body, mind and speech to pure body, mind and speech. Mani means jewel and

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[90] In Tibetan Buddhism, an incarnate lama or highly respected religious teacher.

[91] *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism,* 2013, s.v. "Kāraṇḍavyūha."

[92] Linda Heaphy, "Om Mani Padme Hum—The Mantra of Compassion," https://kashgar.com.au/blogs/ritual-objects/om-mani-padme-hum-a-mantra-of-compassion (accessed May 12, 2019).

[93] Yowandu, "What Could Mean More? Om Mani Padme Hum," https://www.yowangdu.com/tibetan-buddhism/om-mani-padme-hum.html (accessed June 12, 2019).

symbolizes the method, the altruistic intention to become enlightened, compassionate and loving. “Similarly, just as a jewel fulfills the wishes of sentient beings, so the altruistic intention to become enlightened fulfills the wishes of sentient beings.” Padme means lotus and symbolizes wisdom. Purity can be achieved by the indivisible unity of method and wisdom symbolized by the final syllable, Hum. “According to the sutra system, this indivisibility of method and wisdom refers to one consciousness in which there is a full form of both wisdom affected by method and method affected by wisdom.”[94]

Symbolically, lotus-jewel (mani-padme) is one of the many names of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Chenrezig is the name of Avalokiteshvara used by Tibetan Buddhists who consider Chenrezig their protector. By practicing Chenrezig’s mantra, one can accumulate merit and purify his/her delusions.[95] Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ is not addressed to a deity nor is it to be interpreted literally. The power of the mantra is in the sound of the syllables; the mantra is to be spoken.

According to Lobsang Wandgdu,[96] all Tibetan children are taught the mantra and recite it daily and throughout their lives; many people recite it thousands of times each day as part of their prayer practice. The mantra is printed on prayer flags to carry the prayer to the heavens as the winds blow, carved on stones/jewelry, and written on paper and inserted into statues and prayer wheels.

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Lobsang is a web developer, experienced Tibetan cook, and digital photographer with many years of volunteer service for the Tibetan Association of Northern California. He spent over twenty years as a monk training in Buddhist philosophy, and holds a Master’s degree in Madyamika from the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala, India.

Conclusion

When reading the prayers of the Abrahamic traditions, one sees common themes, practices, and use of language. These prayers addressed to the God of Abraham are intended to unite the people of their respective faiths. Whether recited alone or in community, spoken, sung or chanted, one is expressing on behalf of the collective. The three prayers are infused with plural pronouns representing the Jewish, Christian or Muslim community of God. For example, "Hear O' Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One," "Our Father which art in heaven," "Give us this day our daily bread," and "Thee *alone* we worship and to Thee *alone* we pray for help." In addition, while all the prayers are translated into local languages, the Shema and al-Fatiha are more often than not, spoken in the original language while most English-speaking Protestants recite the Lord's Prayer using the verbiage from the 1611 King James Bible. The Shema, Lord's Prayer, and al-Fatiha are often the first prayers taught to children. Each are oft recited in the private, daily life of the believer as well as at nearly all major life events of the individual and community.

In many ways, the Gayatri mantra for Hindus and the mantra of compassion for Tibetan Buddhists are what the Shema, the Lord's Prayer and al-Fatiha are for the followers of the Abrahamic faiths. These mantras are memorized by the devout, often from childhood, recited throughout one's lifetime in private as well as community, and spoken in the original language.

All five prayers also carry with them a certain amount of authority. As previously stated, they are generally memorized in their original form and are not reinterpreted with the passage of time. This fixedness adds to their authoritative voice. To borrow from Mikhail Bakhtin's essay, "Discourse in the Novel," "Often the authoritative word is in

fact a word spoken by another in a foreign language (cf. for example the phenomenon of foreign-language religious texts in most cultures)."[97] They also provide a deep level of comfort in trying times. According to 21st century, poet and theologian, Pádraig Ó Tuama, "…we turn to old words because sometimes it is old words that hold the deepest comfort and the deepest challenge."[98]

What became evident to me as I researched these cornerstone, scriptural prayers in an attempt to understand why spoken prayer is such an integral part of spiritual community and ministry, is that these prayers all unify their communities. It was also clear to me that these prayers/mantras are also commonly spoken out loud. Robert Aitkin wrote, "Surely there is no religious practice more universal than vocalizing."[99]

The Language of Prayer

When I wrote my proposal, I intended to focus my research questions on (1) exploring scriptural prayers from five contemporary faith traditions, (2) exploring the language/words people use to pray, looking for clues that point to the words we *should* use if we want to pray without the use of scriptures, and (3) researching how to teach prayer. I completed the first topic then turned to this one and hit a wall. I delved into poetry as sacred language and while I experienced poetry in a new way for the first time because of my research efforts, I did not believe that I needed to become a poet this late in life in order to be able to pray out loud comfortably. In addition, much of what I read

[97] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michale Holquist, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 343n29.

[98] Pádraig Ó Tuama, *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2017), xix.

[99] Rita M. Gross and Terry C. Muck, *Christians Talk about Buddhist Meditation, Buddhists Talk about Christian Prayer* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 82.

suggested that we should simply speak to the Beloved in our regular voices; show up as our *real* selves. I was at a loss. I put this section aside, turned to my final research question on the pedagogy of spoken prayer and prayed that I would be blessed with divine inspiration when I returned.

When I returned to the topic of the language of prayer, nothing had changed. As you'll see in the section on "Pedagogy of Spoken Prayer," teachers of prayer encourage their students to speak in their own voice and not worry about the words. As I quoted Stanley Hauerwas in Chapter One, "I could not pray differently than I speak" and "… nothing is more eloquent than simplicity."[100]

Walter Wangerin, Jr. shares a story in his book, *Whole Prayer*, that demonstrates this point. While in seminary, he was uncomfortable praying out loud with his beloved wife and refused to pray with her. On the night he conceded, they lay side by side, fully dressed on the bedspread in the dark and he prayed "in heavy cadences, like a hymnal, grandiloquent and measured and gassy with abstractions."[101] She followed, speaking softly to God in the intimacy of the darkness as if they were alone. Wangerin was left humbled by her humility. He felt like an eavesdropper on their conversation. "What room may be furnished more beautifully than the heart where prayer is? For in that room God is."[102]

Where does that leave me? Relieved.

Here are the questions from my proposal:

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[100] Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken*, 12.

[101] Walter Wangerin, Jr., *Whole Prayer: Speaking and Listening to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 96.

[102] Ibid.

What delineates sacred language? How does one know when something is prayer? Are there markers to sacred speech? What role does context play?

I also wrote:

What is it that I'm trying to learn and then teach? I am admittedly venturing into this portion of the research expecting to find signposts that distinguish the sacred from the secular with respect to language. My secret hope is that there aren't and we are each free to express ourselves to the Divine, as we understand her or him, as our hearts choose.

Signposts

Beginning with my search for signposts, I learned that it doesn't matter which words we use to communicate with Source, there are no signposts. Anyone who's been in a room of seminary students praying out loud for the first time will tell you, fumbled or not, the most moving prayers are the ones that are most authentic and sincere. When a student simply speaks the words of their heart to their Creator, you are left feeling like an eavesdropper; humbled with your heart wide open. It can bring you to your knees. Is that not what I was trying to learn?

Context

"Full understanding of any speech act requires knowledge of the context in which it occurs. Language regarded as sacred quite often has for its context a ritual setting."[103] Context does make language sacred. Wheelock explains that there are two basic categories of purpose for words used in religious context: (1) transforming some object or

[103] Wade T. Wheelock, "Language: Sacred Language," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., edited by Lindsay Jones, 5301-5308 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com.contentproxy.phoenix.edu/apps/doc/CX3424501784/GVRL?u=uphoenix_uopx&sid=GVRL&xid=cbeab5ce, (accessed September 10, 2018).

state of affairs and (2) worshipping spiritual beings.[104] He also writes the following which caught my attention:

> The most refined way of giving form to the sounds of language is to craft them into poetry or song. Adherents of many religions have felt that these forms possessed more magical power than prose or are more fitting modes of expression for the very solemn. For example, the traditional distinction between low and high Mass is based primarily on the use in the latter of a sung or chanted liturgy.[105]

Poetry as prayer

Wheelock's quote brings me back to the topic of poetry. I spent a lot of time reading about prayer and poetry and learned much about the power and value of poetry as prayer. "The power of liturgical prayer is similar to the effect of reading a good poem. Indeed, most of Jewish liturgy is poetry. … But it is not only a question of form: there is a deep connection between the experience of a poem and liturgical prayer."[106]

As someone who was challenged by traditional scriptures and the word, *prayer*, poetry was a safe entry point into the world of prayerful language. Prayer and poetry serve many of the same purposes: they are the language of the soul, provide comfort and/or a rallying cry, embrace metaphor to express the inexpressible, and offer a language for humans to communicate with the unseen, larger than life, *something*, that we hope is out there as well as in our own hearts.

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Edward Feld, "Poetry and Prayer," *Cross Currents* 62, no. 1 (March 2012): 71-74, Academic Search Complete, *EBSCOhost* (accessed July 27, 2018).

Not only do the words of the poem/prayer serve to provide us with a language to speak to the Mystery, for many, a poem serves as a catalyst for transformation. Is that not what we ask of our prayers?

Rachel Barenblat, poet and Rabbi, describes the process of writing her devotional poems, "They're transformative work, not only in the sense of work that transforms an original text into something new, but in the sense of work that transforms its creator as it is made. For me, that's the deepest place of connection between poetry and prayer: both of them change me."[107]

Kim Rosen, spoken word artist and poet, encourages her students to engage in a relationship with a poem—"learning by heart." This phrase "holds within it the invitation to receive something with your whole self, not just your mind, and to take it into your body with your breath."[108] She advises her reader that when they engage in a relationship with a poem, they will be changed. She is bold enough to use the word, "conquered." "If anyone is conquered in this partnership, it is you, as you surrender to the poem's guidance and allow it to lead you into unknown territory."[109]

The Psalms, the Gayatri Mantra, and Neil Douglas-Klotz's translation of The Lord's Prayer[110] provide us with three specific examples of when the lines blur between poetry and prayer. Many bhakti movements in India use devotional poetry as prayer[111]

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[107] Rachel Barenblat, "On Poetry and Prayer," *Cross Currents* 62, no. 1 (March 2012): 61-70, Academic Search Complete, *EBSCOhost* (accessed September 4, 2018).

[108] Kim Rosen, *Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2009), 104.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos*, 12.

[111] Wheelock, "Language: Sacred Language."

and the poems of the mystics of all traditions are clearly intended to serve as prayers. Poetry has a rhythm that resonates on a soul level. Pádraig Ó Tuama writes, "Why do we move toward rhythm? Perhaps it's because the first thing we hear—the first thing we feel, it's the same thing—is the heartbeat."[112]

Intention

And what of us non-poets? While I appreciate poetry, I do not pretend to understand the syntax of the form. Aside from leveraging poems written by others, how am I and others like me to structure our sentences when we pray so that we're heard?

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.[113]

Caroline Myss writes, "Holy language is distinctly different from ordinary language, though many of the words are the same. It stands apart from ordinary language because of our intention."[114]

Intention was the answer all along; intention for connection with the Holy in all its expressions. I had to complete all the other chapters of this dissertation before I was able to write this section. My searching took me out into the world of prayer and poetry

[112] Ó Tuama, *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*, xv.

[113] Mary Oliver, "Praying," in *Thirst: Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 37.

[114] From an email received on August 25, 2019 announcing Caroline Myss' workshop, "The Power of Holy Language to Change Your Life," Vancouver BC, October 28—31, 2019.

and returned me back again to my own heart where the lover and the Beloved are one; where prayers reside.

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."[115]

Pedagogy of (Spoken) Prayer

In this section, I turn to those who teach prayer to understand if something as personal as prayer can be taught and if so, how one teaches (spoken) prayer.[116] In Sister Joan Chittister's blog from March 5, 2018, entitled, "Can prayer be 'taught?'" she writes, "…I have come to the point where I doubt that anybody can really 'teach' anybody how to pray. That, I figure, is what life does. We can learn prayer forms, of course, but we do not learn either the function or the purpose of prayer until life drags us to it, naked and in pain."[117] I will return to Sister Joan's comment.

Let us begin with the presumption that prayer can be taught. In response to the question, "can prayer be taught?", Google's search algorithm returned Billy Kangas' blog, The Orant,[118] where he published an article, appropriately entitled, "Ten Tips For Teaching Others How To Pray."[119] Billy Kangas is a Protestant minister who converted

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[115] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," in *Four Quartets* (London : Faber & Faber, 1995), 49.

[116] Most of the material in my research does not distinguish between prayers that are spoken aloud and prayers that are whispered silently in one's heart. I have discovered there needn't be a difference.

[117] Joan Chittister, "Can Prayer Be Taught?," *Joan Chittister,* entry posted March 5, 2018, http://www.joanchittister.org/word-from-joan/3-5-2018/can-prayer-be-taught (accessed August 3, 2019).

[118] An *orant* is defined as 1: a female figure in the posture of prayer in ancient Greek art; 2: a usually female figure standing with outstretched arms as if in prayer used in early Christian art as a symbol of the faithful dead.

[119] Billy Kangas, "Ten Tips For Teaching Others How To Pray," *Patheos,* entry posted July 5, 2013, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/2013/07/10-tips-for-teaching-others-how-to-pray.html (accessed August 4, 2019).

to Catholicism and whose academic research focuses on how prayer, ritual, worship and liturgy impact community life and social action.[120] While admitting there is no one method, he does share ten tips he picked up over the years in his work with adults, teens and children. Kangas' "ten tips" article does not specifically mention spoken prayer; however, one can see that his list is as relevant to spoken prayer as silent prayer (or any spiritual practice). I have included and paraphrased Kanga's "Ten Tips" here; it serves as an excellent starting point.

1. Pray! This is directed to the instructor. It's more challenging to convince others to take on a practice in which the instructor is not engaged. In Kangas' words, "Having a regular prayer life can help keep the conversation honest and open."
2. Pray together. This tip has two parts. First, he advises the instructor to pray with others, be they a prayer group or mentors. Second, he recommends that when one is working with a student, they should pray together. "Pray, pray and then pray some more." This is consistent with every other teacher I've heard or read. He quotes 1 Thessalonians 5:17, where believers are instructed to pray constantly/ceaselessly. Prayer is not an intellectual exercise. Like any skill, one must practice, practice, practice.
3. Pray as you can, not as you can't. The teacher is encouraged to help the student set realistic goals regarding the amount of time that can be devoted to prayer and also to help the student connect with forms of prayer that resonate.
4. Have a big toolbox. This tip naturally builds on the previous. It's important for the teacher to expose the student to different types of prayers and not limit the student's repertoire to only what works for the teacher.

[120] From "About Billy Kangas," https://www.patheos.com/blogs/billykangas/about (accessed August 4, 2019).

5 Keep it interesting. He encourages teachers to talk about their own prayer experiences and share stories about prayer to keep students engaged.

6 Frame prayer as a blessing, not a duty. When viewed as an obligation, it's more challenging to find joy in the act of prayer.

7 Let them know that "dark nights" and "dry spells" are normal, natural, and healthy. "Just because God *seems* distant does not mean that God *is* distant."[121] It's important for students to understand that sometimes prayer will feel exciting and other times, it may feel lifeless. All the saints and sages speak of dry times, students are not alone in this experience.

8 Teach them to make a prayer habit. Kangas explains that prayer's power is often not experienced until after months or years of consistent practice. While it may be difficult to sustain, he strongly encourages students to form a prayer habit.

9 Help them to find others to pray with. It is easier to maintain a prayer habit if one feels supported by a group and accountable to the group for their prayer life.

10 Create a Rule of Life. A rule of life is a contract one makes with oneself. For example, a student may want to pray daily, attend worship services weekly and go on retreat once per year. As the teacher or companion, assist the student with making the rule of life manageable and to stick with it. It can always be adjusted.

Reading through this list, two primary themes call to me: pray as you can[122] and pray often (alone or with a group). Helping a student "pray as you can" is where a teacher

[121] Kangas, "Ten Tips."

[122] According to L. Roger Owens, from "Pray as You Can, Not as You Can't: Exploring a Prayer Slogan," www.theotherjournal.com, August 23, 2012, "'pray as you can, and do not try to pray as you can't' was the pithy advice given by Abbot John Chapman (1865–1933) to the laypeople, monks, nuns, and priests who wrote to him seeking guidance in a life of prayer. Chapman was an English Benedictine monk, abbot, and scholar of early church history. But he's best known for his *Spiritual Letters*, the collection of his replies to the queries of the men and women who wrote to him."

can add the greatest value; guiding a student as they find their voice and a prayer language that speaks to them.

I am adding two more tips to Kangas' list:

1. Engage in self-inquiry, contemplation, and meditation. Ideally in partnership with a spiritual director, self-inquiry is critical for many students. Students' anxieties, assumptions and personal mythology around prayer are often based in an unexplored past. Gentle inquiry and contemplation, with a sense of curiosity not judgment, can begin the process of transforming prayer from a dreaded chore/challenge to a joyful experience of union with Spirit. Meditation offers a respite from the search for words and provides an opportunity for sacred listening.
2. Read, write, and speak what others have written. Why can't prayer be easeful and joyful? Who says that prayer must be original and spontaneous? Encourage students to lose themselves (often) in the lyrical sounds of prayers and poems written by those graced with the gift of eloquence.

Pray As You Can

Wise teachers of prayer agree that students should pray as they can and not as they can't. One approach to finding a prayer style that resonates with an individual's personality can be found in *Who We Are is How We Pray: Matching Personality and Spirituality*, by Charles J. Keating. In his book, Keating explains the relationship between the Myers-Briggs Personality Type[123] and a person's preferred prayer style. As a theologian, spiritual counselor, priest, family man, consultant and expert on Myers-Briggs, he brings together two of his areas of expertise to guide his reader in identifying and understanding his/her Myers-Briggs personality type and matching it with a Christian

[123] See www.myersbriggs.org for all you need to know about Myers-Briggs history and instrument.

prayer style. There are sixteen basic personality types of Myers-Briggs, based on combinations of eight characteristics or qualities: extravert/introvert; sensing/ intuitive; feeling/thinking; perceiving/judging. He dedicates one chapter to each of the eight characteristics and uses the spiritual styles of St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to illustrate how different approaches to spiritual practices, including prayer, suit the different needs of the distinct personality types.

For Christians who are familiar with their Myers-Briggs classification, *Who We Are is How We Pray*, can serve as a helpful guide. For the broader audience, it reinforces the message that there is no one way to pray even among saints, mystics and Jesuits. That is an invaluable lesson for students of prayer.

Marcus Braybrooke's, *Learn to Pray: A Practical Guide to Faith and Inspiration*, includes a section entitled, "pray as you can, not as you can't." Located within the first chapter, this section contains the first two steps to learning to pray; step one: free yourself from preconceived notions of what prayer is and step two: forget any fixed ideas you may have about *how* to pray. Step one provides an opportunity for self-inquiry; a topic covered in greater detail below. Regarding step two, he goes on to say:

> We do not need to worry whether we use words or keep quiet, whether we kneel down or sit or stand, whether we place our hands together or hold prayer beads. We can pray at anytime, anywhere, in any way. The only prerequisite for prayer is that we be ourselves.[124]

Braybrooke then takes his reader/student on a journey of exploration with the aim of helping her/him find their own way of praying. Each beautifully illustrated chapter

[124] Marcus Braybrooke, *Learn to Pray: A Practical Guide to Faith and Inspiration* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011), 14.

contains quotes, teachings and exercises from across the world's faith traditions and concludes with prayers from different traditions. He provides an inter-faith reading list at the end of the book.

Anne Lamott writes in *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*, "It doesn't matter how you pray—with your head bowed in silence, or crying out in grief, or dancing. Churches are good for prayer, but so are garages and cars and mountains and showers and dance floors."[125] Her go-to book on prayer for me is *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*. This inspiring little book is filled with stories and encouragement for anyone who wants to learn to pray. Throughout, she shares her *real* self with the reader and encourages the reader to share their *real* selves with God through prayer. "So, prayer is our sometimes real selves trying to communicate with the Real, with Truth, with the Light. It is us reaching out to be heard, hoping to be found by the light and warmth in the world, instead of darkness and cold."[126] Lamott is very clear from page one onward that if the word God is too triggering or ludicrous for the reader, they are welcome to use any word that works for them; pray as you can. "Nothing could matter less than what we call this force."[127] Without providing too much structure, Lamott does provide her reader with a starting point for prayer with help, thanks, wow: prayers asking for help, prayers expressing gratitude, and prayers expressing awe.

[125] From One Spirit's Daily Practice: Sacred Reading and Meditation, August 13, 2019. You can sign up for daily inspirational quotes here: https://www.onespiritinterfaith.org/sacred-practice/subscribe/

[126] Anne Lamott, *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 7.

[127] Ibid., 2.

This loose structure, similar to providing a writing prompt, is one of the techniques David Wallace uses at One Spirit Interfaith Seminary when he teaches the module on prayer. After a full day of teachings of and about prayer from across traditions, students are divided into dyads and each takes a turn offering a prayer for help, of thanks, and in awe. While some years he does offer students a loose format for their prayers, generally, he encourages students to pray from their hearts and to try not to concern themselves with what they think a prayer looks or sounds like.

Another teaching included in the One Spirit curriculum to help students access their own experience of the Divine for purposes of prayer and contemplation is The Three Faces of Spirit from Integral Theory. Ken Wilber introduces this concept in *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World*.[128] Diane Berke, founder and Spiritual Director of One Spirit Learning Alliance, first explains the concept that Spirit/God can be approached from the first person (I), second person (you/thou) and/or third person (it) and exists in all three states simultaneously. She then guides students through a meditation where they can experience Spirit in each of its three expressions. This access to the Divine in its different states is intended to expand a student's experience of and vocabulary around Spirit.

Form

There is freedom in the invitation to pray as one feels called, without rules or scripts. For some students, however, a teacher or spiritual director can't merely suggest

[128] Terry Patten, also of Integral, posted a pdf document on The Three Faces of Spirit which I used as a handout in my "Pray Like The Poets" workshop. https://www.terrypatten.com/the-three-faces-of-spirit/.

that they find their voice without providing structure. Many students, especially in the beginning, need a template as a starting point for writing/developing prayers.

Myers-Briggs and Spirituality

In *Who We Are is How We Pray*, Keating describes forms of Ignatian, Salesian, Teresian and Chardinian spirituality and includes prayer practices and suggested language for each of the sixteen Myers-Briggs personality types in his closing chapter. His belief is that his readers will find more than one prayer style appealing for a variety of reasons and encourages students to experiment with the different formats he provides.

Here is one of the sixteen spiritual practice examples provided by Keating: *The Extraverted Intuitive Feeling Perceiving Personality (ENFP).*[129]

The Holy Spirit

Consideration: The Spirit is the breath of creation, making all things in the image of the father's love, Jesus. Jesus hesitated to tell us of the Spirit, to tell us that his own presence was only temporary (Read *Jn*. 16:4-7 & 12-14). What was begun in love must be fulfilled in love. And love is a feeling.

Reflection: At Pentecost the Spirit, the Spirit Jesus, was freed to be shared by all believers, making us "other Christs." That is why Jesus had to leave us. If we let the spirit of Jesus, he illuminates our imperfections, burns away our scales of blindness, and warms our way in a cold world.

He is our consolation, while remaining our challenge. He comes to build bridges with others, not to comfort us before our own fireplaces.

[129] Charles J. Keating, *Who We Are is How We Pray: Matching Personality and Spirituality* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987), 140-141.

Closing Prayer: (Feel the presence of the Spirit in imageless "blindness." Be silent and at peace.)

> I am within the Trinity, in the love between Father and Son that is the spirit. I am patient and kind, never jealous, never boastful, never conceited, delighted by truth, always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, to endure whatever comes. (See 1 *Cor.* 13: 4-8).
>
> Father, with the Spirit and in the name of Jesus, I beg you, let me act as I am.

Pray Like This

Erik Walker Wikstrom's *Simply Pray, A Modern Spiritual Practice to Deepen Your Life,* is a guidebook written for contemporary spiritual seekers who are not tied to a particular tradition. I was drawn to the book because of the title and his interfaith approach. Wikstrom is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister who was also a student of Zen Buddhism for nearly twenty years. Wikstrom respects his reader's intelligence and does not presume that because someone does not pray that they are not deeply spiritual. He includes himself in the category of "religious eclectics."

In his book, Wikstrom strives to demystify prayer. He points out that similar prayer forms are found in many of today's religious traditions. In Christianity, they are known as *praise and thanksgiving, confession, meditation and intercession.* He renames them, *Naming, Knowing, Listening and Loving*, and approaches prayer through each of these lenses in his chapter, "We Call It Prayer."

To support his readers on their journey, he opens up the world of prayer beyond traditional words and suggests that,

> Looking at the form of prayer rather than its content—at the *how* of it rather than the *why* or to *whom*—can point the way toward the development of a modern prayer practice that is free of specific metaphors and images, not tied to any particular religious worldview, and not

> demanding adherence to any one set of religious symbols and expressions.[130]

In his chapter, "Pray Like This," he deconstructs The Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-Third Psalm, Thomas Merton's prayer, a Bodhisattva's prayer, and Starhawk's prayer and then writes his own prayer following each form. This provides the reader with templates they can use to write their own prayers using whichever format appeals to them. I extracted from Wikstrom's chapter and created a handout for participants of my workshop who wanted a form for their prayers. (See Appendix J: Prayer Structures.)

His book is intended to put his readers at ease and encourages them to find their own practices and voice when praying.

Collect

Pádraig Ó Tuama taught the sixth week of my workshop. Because he is a poet and theologian, he shared poetry and taught us the Christian collect. As he writes, "All form—like the sonnet, haiku or collect—can, through adherence, aid the one forming in patient unfolding of a thought."[131] The collect is a prayer format that is attributed to Archbishop Cranmer in the first Book of Common Prayer (1549).[132] As Ó Tuama teaches it, the collect has five parts: (1) name God, (2) expand upon the address, (3) name your desire or need, (4) link the purpose of the desire with the name by which God was addressed at the beginning, and (5) close with Amen or "bird of praise."[133] His book,

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[130] Erik Walker Wikstrom, *Simply Pray, A Modern Spiritual Practice to Deepen Your Life* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2005), 8.

[131] Pádraig Ó Tuama, http://www.padraigotuama.com/news/stationsofthecross (accessed October 25, 2019).

[132] Greg Goebel, "What is a Collect?," Anglican Pastor, January 29, 2015, https://anglicanpastor.com/the-collects/ (accessed October 25, 2019).

[133] This was an expression Pádraig used meaning a small amount of gratitude.

Daily Prayers With the Corrymeela Community is a beautiful, heart-opening and heartbreaking collection of prayers, many in the form of collects.

The following from page 9 provides an example of a collect written by Pádraig:

God of fear,
God of the night,
God of the expectation,
You visited shepherds in the night
with songs and sights of joy.
In all of our nights, turn us
towards hope, because
hope might just
keep us alive.
Amen.

Affirmative Prayer

My colleague at One Spirit Learning Alliance and occasional teacher of prayer, Mark Fowler, introduced me to the affirmative prayer model used in New Thought organizations. "Affirmative prayer reflects the certainty that we are each being led to our highest good, despite any temporary appearances."[134]

Unity, founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in the late 1800s, is a thriving global New Thought organization whose members practice affirmative prayer. The five-step process for affirmative prayer is found at unity.org.[135]

1. Relaxation. Breathe deeply and focus within. Become willing to know a truth that frees you from all concerns.
   How to: Take deep, conscious breaths. As you relax your body and release busy thoughts, feel your heart opening up.

[134] Unity, "What Is Affirmative Prayer?," https://www.unity.org/prayer/what-affirmative-prayer (accessed October 25, 2019).

[135] Unity, "Five Step Prayer Practice," https://www.unity.org/resources/articles/unity-five-step-prayer-process (accessed October 27, 2019).

2. Concentration. Recognize the power of God as life, love, wisdom, and ever-present good.
   How to: Center your thoughts on the ever-present energy of God in your life. You might want to inhale God is, exhale I AM.
3. Meditation. In silent reflection, see that the power of God is the same power within you—your divine potential.
   How to: In silence, experience the power of your own divinity, knowing you share all the attributes of God—love, strength, wisdom.
4. Realization. Know that you have the power to be, to do, to have, and to allow the good you desire.
   How to: Feel a click as everything falls into place and you know all is well, regardless of outer circumstances. It is done.
5. Appreciation. Grateful for your growing spiritual awareness, you are empowered to live fully now and into a fulfilling future.
   How to: Empower your life with every expression of gratitude.

There are volumes of affirmative prayers available for any occasion, in print and online and classes on prayer are offered at Unity centers around the world. Here is one example from the unity.org website to demonstrate the format: In the midst of pain, I affirm healing. In the midst of broken hearts, I affirm love. God is a presence of peace that knows no bounds.

Prayer Beads

Prayer beads are used in many traditions to provide form and structure to a prayer practice. Each tradition has its rules regarding the number of beads and how they are to be strung together, held and handled, but most prayer beads are strung in a circle. They serve to provide a tangible and kinetic experience of prayer. In most traditions, words are recited while one bead is held and repeated as the beads move through the fingers of the prayer. In Hinduism, this mantra practice might consist of the words, Sri Ram, Jai Ram,

Jai Jai Ram (mantra of Hanuman).[136] One might hear a Buddhist chanting, Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha (heart sutra mantra) while turning mala beads. A Christian with a contemplative practice might be repeating the phrase, be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10), while a Muslim might be chanting, La illaha illallah (there is no God but Allah) while turning tesbih.

The words can be spoken aloud, in a whisper or silently; they can be in any language that feels comfortable to the person chanting and for those unaffiliated with a tradition, there is an opportunity to create one's own mantra(s). For many, prayer beads keep the mind focused and the hands occupied so the spirit can simply be.

With all these forms available to us, why are so many people still struggling with prayer? Returning to Sister Joan, we can teach form, but are we teaching prayer?

Self-Inquiry, Contemplation, Meditation

"Only when you have come to know your true Self will you be fully known—realizing at last that you are a child of the Living One."[137] On my journey to find my voice in prayer, I had to look inward for the source of my anxiety as well as the source of prayer; and I continue to practice self-inquiry, contemplation and meditation. For this reason, I believe these practices are integral to any curriculum designed to teach prayer.

It appears that Teresa of Avila is in agreement. From her book, *The Interior Castle*, quoted in *Who We Are is How We Pray*:

> First is the mansion of Self-knowledge. "It is no small pity and shame, that by our own fault, we do not understand ourselves, nor realize who we are.

[136] Shri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram is the song/mantra that Hanuman is always singing. Rama is the name that Maharaj-ji always had on his lips. It is the mantra that purifies the heart and bestows devotion to God. See https://krishnadas.com/lyrics/shri-ram-jai-ram/.

[137] Extracted from Logion 3 of *The Gospel of Thomas: Wisdom of the* Twin, 2nd ed., translated by Lynn Bauman (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2012), 9.

> . . .knowledge of ourselves is so important, that I do not wish you ever to neglect it, however lofty your contemplation may be . . .”[138]

Teresa uses seven mansions to represent the evolution of the spiritual journey. The first mansion, mansion of Self-knowledge, provides the foundation. For context, the second mansion is the mansion of Detachment, the third is the mansion of Humility and Aridity, the fourth is the mansion of Affective Prayer, the fifth is the mansion of Beginning Union with God, the sixth is mansion of Mystical Experience and the Prayer of Quiet, followed by the seventh, the mansion of Peaceful Union with God.

When Mark Fowler taught his prayer class at New Thought Spiritual Center of Eastern Long Island, he began with an invitation to self-inquiry. He provided his students with questions for reflection followed by dyad and group sharing. His questions included:

a. What does it mean to pray?
b. What do you believe prayer can change?
c. What challenges are you facing in life right now?
d. Do you have a spiritual daily practice for prayer? If so, what is it? If not, is there anything keeping you from creating one?

Marcus Braybrooke writes in chapter one of *Learn to Pray: “*The first step to learning to pray is to free ourselves from preconceptions of what prayer is. Perhaps childhood memories of being forced to say prayers have put us off for years; we may not believe in God; or we may doubt whether prayer has any effect.”[139] Braybrooke writes that these will often fade as we discover the peace that prayer can bring. *Learn to Pray*

[138] Keating, *Who We Are is How We Pray,* 26, quoting Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1945), 7, 12.

[139] Braybrooke, *Learn to Pray*, 14.

strives to guide students to that place of peace and includes contemplative practices and guided meditations as expressions of prayer.

Prayer, I learned, in an inside job. As Sister Joan said, "I doubt that anybody can really 'teach' anybody how to pray. That, I figure, is what life does." To that, I'll add something Wikstrom wrote in *Simply Pray*, "...life is not out there; that's only where we've erected the altars. Life is right here—as close as our breathing, as close as the pulsing vein in our necks, as close as our dreaming."[140] Yes, life will be the teacher if we allow it.

The inner work, self-inquiry, meditation, and sitting with our questions and conflicts around prayer, these are the first steps to creating a receptive foundation for the forms, lessons and guidance that are available from teachers, pastors and spiritual directors.

Read, Write, Speak What Others Have Written

"Now remember, Carol, to read a prayer is the same as saying a prayer. Either way, the grace comes through."[141] Communicating with the divine should not feel like a burden or a chore. There is no sacred edict or command to pray spontaneously. If our longing is a relationship with Spirit and our desire is for words that are eloquent, we are invited to joyfully turn to those whose gift is the ability to express on behalf of the collective. There is no reason to get tangled up trying to live out someone else's dharma.

[140] Ibid., 124.

[141] As said to Caroline Myss and quoted in her book, *Entering the Castle: Finding the Inner Path to God and Your Soul's Purpose* (New York: First Press, 2007), 2.

My favorite verse from the Bhagavad-Gita, verse 3.35, comes to mind, "It is more salutary to carry out your own Law poorly, than another's Law well; it is better to die in your own Law than to prosper in another's."[142]

Walter Wangerin, Jr., lovingly writes in his book, *Whole Prayer: Speaking and Listening to God*:

> We are surrounded by a host of those whose grace it is to pray well! Psalmists, poets, martyrs, saints and witnesses, men and women of gentle faith, people of suffering and joy. And what shall we do with their gifts?
>
> It is no less a prayer if we take their words and make them our own, for one may build a beautiful house then give it away so that another one might live in it.
>
> [He goes on to further say], Or we may, as I do often, curl ourselves privately within the beautiful petitions of voices more angelic than ours and let their prayers themselves become the answers, the murmurings of the dear God unto us.[143]

The words of others may serve as us speaking or as God answering or both, for paradox is the nature of the Divine.

In *Learn to Pray*, Braybrooke suggests an exercise in a section titled, "Using a Prayer Book." He recommends that the reader acquire several prayer anthologies and also create one by capturing in a small, sturdy notebook anything they "find inspirational—prayers, poems, lines from songs, sentences from novels, quotations from newspapers, dialogue from films or television, snippets of advice in your friends' letters."[144] The

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[142] J.A.B. van Buitenen, ed. and trans., *The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata: A Bilingual Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 85.

[143] Wangerin, *Whole Prayer*, 51-52.

[144] Braybrooke, 102.

student is to then memorize some of these helpful prayers and passages so that inspirational words are available at times of need.

Or a student may choose to memorize the 150 Psalms.

Not only does memorizing traditional prayers give you something to say when you may not have the words, but knowing that that same prayer has been prayed by countless others throughout the centuries can give you a feeling of kinship and belonging. You do not stand alone before the Great Mystery; you stand with all those who have also recited these words—past, present, and future.[145]

In *Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words,* Kim Rosen guides her reader in their relationship with poetry written by someone else:

To take them deeply into your life and speak them aloud brings every level of who you are—your thoughts, your words, your feelings, and even your physical energies—into alignment with what matters most to you. You are receiving and giving voice not only to the poem but also to your own soul.[146]

She also writes of "the pleasure and grace that comes when the poem has become yours,"[147] implying that something transformational happens when you invite someone else's poetry into your soul, allowing it to move through your heart to be expressed anew in your voice.

[145] Wikstrom, *Simply Pray*, 48.

[146] Rosen, *Saved by a Poem*, xxi.

[147] Ibid, xxiii.

Pray!

We return to the guidance of John Chapman, "pray as you can, and do not try to pray as you can't." Whether one is intending to pray spontaneously or by reciting prayers written by those one considers more eloquent, in the end, the only way to learn to pray is to pray. Wikstrom writes in *Simply Pray*, to "simply pray. Pray without any preconceived notion of what you're doing or why. Simply do it, and see what happens. After you pray, *then* begin to think."[148] He reassures his reader with the following:

> …getting the words "right"—whether in recited prayers from traditions, or in spontaneous prayers of the heart—should never be an overriding concern. There is no magic in the words themselves. It is, rather, the attitude one brings to prayer—the honesty and authenticity, the openness and vulnerability, the courage and commitment—that is primary.[149]

And finally, my favorite directive to date ... from the inimitable and succinct Caroline Myss, "pray like you're crazy!"[150]

[148] Wikstrom, 49.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Caroling Myss, Caroline's Blog, "Our Need for Inspiration," https://www.myss.com/our-need-for-inspiration/ (accessed December 15, 2019).

CHAPTER 5
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

I was accompanied on my eight-week exploration of spoken prayer by twelve brave souls who emerged out of my One Spirit and Nine Gates communities. My compatriots were like-minded individuals who identified as spiritual, believed in a higher power, and claimed a variety of religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Interfaith/Interspiritual, Spiritual Eclectic and "no particular." Consistent with my life and research findings, the majority meditated and/or prayed regularly and their prayers were generally solitary and silent. Seven of the twelve were either Interfaith ministers trained in Spiritual Counseling or currently enrolled at One Spirit Learning Alliance. This was a group that wanted to experience more ease when praying out loud. Two of the participants were on my site team. Eleven joined me via video conference on Monday evenings in February and March of 2019 and one participated after the course concluded by watching the eight recordings at her own pace. Two guest teachers joined us in weeks five and six of the program: Deborah Jones, Executive Director of Nine Gates, Inc. and founder of Nine Gates Esoteric School and author, poet and theologian, Pádraig Ó Tuama. [151]

I set out to achieve three goals with my workshop, "Pray Like The Poets: Finding Your Voice": (a) increase the participants' self-awareness around their relationship to

[151] I encourage you to visit http://www.padraigotuama.com/ and https://onbeing.org/ to read and listen to Pádraig's words.

prayer (the word and the concept), (b) introduce poetry and prose as forms of sacred language and provide the group with opportunities to share aloud writings that inspire them, and (c) move the group organically to writing and speaking prayers (now broadly defined) in their own words and with more ease. These three goals, in this order, created the arc of the class.

Goals and Strategies

Self-Inquiry

My first goal was to encourage and provide opportunities for self-inquiry by the workshop participants. Self-inquiry played a major role in helping me move beyond my anxieties around spoken prayer. I utilized several strategies to aid the group in the process.

First, prior to our first class, participants were asked to complete a pre-class questionnaire and identify their level of distress, when asked to pray out loud, using a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) [152] (see Appendix C: Self-Assessment Questionnaire (pre-class), question 10). I also asked, "What do you hope to get out of this workshop?" in question 11, but received back mostly surface level responses. Second, at the start of the first class, after I introduced myself and before they introduced themselves, I provided the group with an opportunity to journal. I used the following suggested questions for contemplation: what words would I use to describe my feelings when I hear or say the word, prayer; if prayer were a person, what would I say to it and what is it saying to me; do I feel differently about spoken prayer versus silent prayer? I also included: If you are

[152] From Physiopedia.com, "A Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) is a measurement instrument that tries to measure a characteristic or attitude that is believed to range across a continuum of values and cannot easily be directly measured," https://www.physio-pedia.com/Visual_Analogue_Scale#cite_note-cebp-1.

comfortable praying out loud—please explore if this was always the case or if there was a turning point and what that was.

Third, I felt it was important that we each share with the group something, if only a word, from our journaling. From my experience, there is great power in including everyone's voice in the room. Each person was invited to share as much as they were comfortable as part of their introduction. I captured common themes and also some questions that came to the surface during the exercise. Fourth, the group engaged in an open dialogue around what revealed itself during the exercise.

Since self-inquiry is a life-long pursuit, I included time for introspection and journaling each week we met. Some weeks there were no instructions and other weeks, I provided a writing prompt. Many of the participants shared with me that they greatly appreciated the opportunity to reflect during each class.

To assess my first goal, I asked participants in the mid-class and post-class questionnaires to capture their discoveries and "aha" moments (see Appendix D: Mid-Class Questionnaire and Appendix E: Post-Class Questionnaire). Consolidated results can be found in Appendix H: Workshop "Aha" Moments.

Beyond Traditional Prayers

Parker Palmer wrote,

> Like a wild animal, the soul is tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.[153]

[153] Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life : Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2008), 58.

In my personal work and in my workshop, I used poetry and prose to lure the soul out—lure our voices out—so that spoken prayer could come naturally of its own accord, in its own time. My second goal consisted of two parts, (a) introduce the idea of using poetry and prose as vehicles for soulful expression and (b) because I wanted the workshop to be experiential, include time each week for participants to practice speaking in front of the group.

I used multiple strategies to achieve this goal. To begin, I provided participants with a list of authors whose work I felt spoke to the soul so they could expand their own libraries and have a starting point for their first assignment (see Appendix I: Resources). I then asked participants to come to each class with several selections written by someone else. They were encouraged to select prose, poetry, essays, excerpts from a novel, anything that touched their hearts. They were then invited to read aloud and share why they chose the writing they brought; elaborate on what made it feel like a prayer or sacred writing. While each person read, the group was encouraged to listen with their hearts and bodies to see if any particular style or words resonated. One pleasant surprise that came from this exercise early on was that one participant selected a beloved song as his reading. It expanded the conversation for the entire group. Lastly, each week, after everyone had an opportunity to read, the group engaged in a discussion where they shared how it felt to read, to be witnessed, and to listen. The group bonded quickly and enjoyed the exchange of poems and songs.

I assessed my second goal by tracking the engagement level of the participants in my journal. I captured whether or not each person brought readings and if they chose to read aloud. Only twice during our eight weeks together did anyone opt out of

participating. The group greatly enjoyed this segment of the class. On more than one occasion, a participant acknowledged a fellow student for their contribution the previous week and shared that they used that student's reading in some capacity after they heard it. It was exciting to hear that our work together was not only positively impacting the group members but also others beyond our circle.

In One's Voice

My final and most critical goal was, "To develop comfort with the thinking and writing process of prayer that will include the writing and the reading out loud of prayers in the individual's own voice." [154]

Once again, I laid out three strategies to support my efforts. First, I planned on including guest teachers who were adept at prayer. I was blessed to have Deborah Jones and Pádraig Ó Tuama teach weeks five and six of the workshop. My request of them was that the class be interactive and experiential; neither disappointed. Both teachers added tremendously to the experience. Deborah led us in exercises to help us connect with the inner world of our intentions/prayers and Pádraig engaged us with different poets and their poems and taught us the collect prayer structure. I originally intended to include three guest teachers at weeks three, five, and seven. As is often the case, fate had another plan and it was perfect. The group had managed four weeks without a *grownup* or expert in the room and learned to trust each other and our own inner wisdom by the time our teachers arrived.

[154] See Appendix A, 27.

My second strategy involved inviting the participants to share original writings with the group. I had intended to do this in weeks four, six, and eight, however, I decided early on that it made sense to begin with week two for those who felt comfortable.

My third strategy consisted of what I called, "loving feedback." This involved asking the listening participants to provide positive/affirming feedback to each speaker after the speaker shared a reading. We followed the touchstones established by Parker Palmer; we committed to no fixing, advising, saving or correcting one another. Listeners were invited to focus on what touched them and how the prose, poetry or prayer made them feel. This time of sharing and appreciation was intended to increase the sense of safety in the group. The kind words were always appreciated.

As I was developing the curriculum, I added a fourth strategy to help the group move toward the goal of comfortably praying in their own words. Starting in week three, people were encouraged to ask for prayers for themselves, friends, family members, communities, etc. and in response, the other participants took turns offering spontaneous prayers or readings from books they had handy. We used this exercise in weeks three, four and seven. We also used this time to pray for members of the group who were ill or dealing with a crisis and unable to join us that particular evening.

Finally, going into week four, I decided on another exercise that I wanted to try in the workshop. It was all a grand experiment after all. I called it the "community prayer." This exercise was not in the original syllabus, but my companions were open to trying something new and untested. One person started us off with an opening line and one by one we added a line or two until the last person brought us to a close. It was an absolutely

lovely way to weave the group together and we were praying! I later transcribed the prayer and sent it to everyone as a keepsake.

To assess my final goal, participants were asked to complete a post-class, self-assessment which included the same VAS from the pre-workshop assessment and where they captured whether their level of distress shifted during the eight-week class. Many also elaborated on their experience in the question that pertained to "aha" moments. Looking only at the VAS readouts, eight out of the ten post class questionnaires reflected some diminishment of distress for the class participants (two individuals did not complete the post class questionnaire). One student who did not experience a change in her distress level did share the following in her post-class questionnaire, "if I had put more into it, I think I would be at least down to moderate, if not mild or no distress." I'd like to believe that Henri Nouwen is smiling at her remark. "The only way to pray is to pray, and the way to pray well is to pray much." We prayed much… and I trust, we prayed well.

CHAPTER 6
MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

At different times during my project journey, I took on the role of project manager, spiritual companion, humble witness, conscious observer and enthusiastic student. For purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the two ministerial competencies my site team and I agreed at the start of this process were to be my focus and will elaborate on the steps taken to achieve and measure the objectives we set out.

Prayer Leader

My friend and workshop participant, Tracy Robinson gifted me with a bracelet at the start of the class that was engraved with the words, "Prayer Warrior." Prior to the launch of my workshop, I would *never* have used those words to describe myself. I decided to suspend disbelief, "act as if" until it felt real, and wear the bracelet often.

Working on this ministerial competency, the ability to pray unscripted in front of a group, was the crux of my work and more than a mere *stretch goal*. My proposal included three strategies that I believed would get me there. I intended to immerse myself in prayers and poetry, with daily readings, preferably out loud, start a personal prayer journal where I would write my own prayers and keep a personal journal to track my progress through the fear and resistance tied to spoken prayer that led me to this project initially.

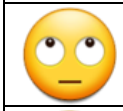
I was pleased to find that these practices did have a positive impact, especially when I applied them consistently. Reading out loud to myself was not comfortable and

admittedly, not something I did often enough; although it is a practice that Kim Rosen discusses in her book, *Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words,* and something I encouraged my workshop participants to do. Writing prayers or poems as often as possible made a tremendous difference in the way I thought about prayer and the ease with which the words flowed. I experimented with different structures and words and found beauty in what I wrote. I discovered that I didn't need to address my prayer to anyone, I could just dive right in. That alleviated the pressure to find a name for that which cannot be named. I also found that uncomplicated repetition worked and sometimes simply breathing in community can be a lovely way to begin or end a prayer. I reminded myself often of Stanley Hauerwas' book, *Prayers Plainly Spoken* and my mantra of *simplicity*.

Since I was back at One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, a community that prayed, I had the opportunity to listen and learn from my colleagues who were more comfortable than I with spoken prayer. As I experienced the prayers of others, I noticed that when they sounded the most themselves was when I was most touched; the pauses or hesitations did not take away from their impact. Some people were able to craft beautifully long and eloquent prayers while others spoke short and equally powerful prayers. Each was perfect because it was real.

I measured my own progress as a *prayer leader* in two ways, one internally and one externally. To assess the change in my inner world, I used the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) and recorded my anxiety/distress level over a period of 18 months, starting with my feelings when asked to pray at NYTS in October 2017 and concluding in April 2019 after completing my workshop (see below). I found that as I felt more comfortable in my

surroundings, I was more comfortable praying out loud. I was also significantly more at ease praying aloud when I spent more time reading and writing prayers/poems. I used these pieces of information about my own process in the development of my class. I worked to ensure there was plenty of opportunity for practice and sharing and that people felt safe. I felt strongly that a feeling of safety was going to be critical to the success of my class.

		Oct. 2017	Feb. 2018	June 2018	Sept. 2018	Nov. 2018	Feb. 2019	March 2019	April 2019
	No Distress								
	Mild Distress			x			x	x	x
	Moderate Distress				x	x			
	Severe Distress		x						
	Very Severe Distress	x							

While I didn't achieve a feeling of "no distress," the level of "distress" had become minimal and was no longer getting in the way of my offering my voice in prayer.

The tool I used to measure my competency as a prayer leader through the eyes of *other* was the post-class questionnaire found in Appendix E. Specifically, I asked the workshop participants, "How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt?" Participants were asked to rate me on a scale of 1-3: 1. Fair: sounded mechanical, 2. Good: prayers sounded/felt thoughtful/heartfelt, or 3. Excellent: prayers sounded/felt thoughtful/heartfelt and she demonstrated the practices

and tools being offered in the course. Of the twelve participants, ten completed the post-class questionnaire and all ten rated me a "3."

On January 15, 2019, a year after I thought I was going to quit the program, I wrote this prayer/intention for my project in my journal:

> I give thanks to the path that brought me here today. I trust the love, wisdom, and knowing that served as my guides.
>
> Please infuse my project with love, energy, power and humor. Give it the light it needs to shine and draw people to it.
>
> Open my being to the joy in the journey. Help me to lighten up! Density and intensity have their place—and here in this project is not it.
>
> Help me to connect with the participants on the heart level, to create a safe and welcoming environment, and serve as a faithful companion.
>
> May it serve to bring healing to our world. And so it is.

And on February 5, 2019, "I want to pray" came joyfully out of my mouth at a One Spirit deans' meeting. That was the second time during the seminary school year that I eagerly volunteered to pray, because I needed to hear a prayer and wanted to be the person to provide it. It appeared that I had achieved my objective of being more comfortable spontaneously praying out loud. Blessed be.

Spiritual Educator

It became evident to me as I worked through my own anxiety, that I cannot teach myself or anyone how to pray because the prayer is always there in every word we speak from our heart. What I wanted for myself (and later for others) was to remove the fear and any other feelings that were getting in the way of my heart expressing through my voice. My greatest learning was that it was an inside job. It wasn't a matter of putting information in but of removing impediments. I kept that knowing in the forefront as I developed and delivered my workshop.

At the time of my proposal, my objective as a spiritual educator was to "develop and deliver a workshop that will increase the confidence and competency of the participants to pray out loud by accessing their own inner wisdom."[155] I chose the following three strategies to help me achieve my objective: educate myself on the best practices for creating workshops and trainings for spiritual development, learn from others by participating in workshops to experience how others in the field of spiritual development deliver a training experience, and develop the curriculum for the workshop.

To learn best practices for my chosen modality, I attended two classes that utilized Zoom video technology. Bob Demetrician offered a class entitled, "How to Run an Online Program." From Bob's class, I learned about the different technology options available to me and some good logistical best practices. The second was an online class offered by Alden Solovy,[156] "Ingredients of Prayer: Writing Contemporary Liturgy." His workshop was structured exactly as I intended mine to be. We were a small group, meeting exclusively on Zoom over the course of several weeks. The key piece of guidance that I picked up from Alden was the importance of including rituals in the workshop. Something I had not thought of prior. Rituals help carve out sacred space and time and even the simplest rituals work well in virtual community. Alden also did a great job of keeping it informal and conversational.

With respect to participating in classes and workshops designed for spiritual seekers, I participated in Esoteric School, an eleven-day residential experience with four different teachers from four distinct backgrounds, I traveled to Egypt with Deborah Jones

[155] Appendix A, 35.

[156] I feel blessed to have come discovered Alden and often turn to his work when I need a prayer or poem. You can find him at tobendlight.com.

and Normandi Ellis[157] to briefly live in the mythology still alive in the country of my birth, I took Craig Hamilton's[158] twelve-week online meditation class, "The Practice of Direct Awakening," and I was back in the classroom at One Spirit where several classes are dedicated to the practice of prayer.[159]

The final strategy I set for myself was the completion of my workshop. I successfully developed and delivered an eight-week workshop to eleven participants who showed up every Monday in February and March 2019 from 6:30-8pm ET and one participant who watched the recordings on her own schedule. The complete syllabus can be found in Appendix F: Workshop Syllabus.

To assess my proficiency as a spiritual educator, the workshop participants were asked to complete a post-class questionnaire that included the following questions specific to my abilities as an educator:

- Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.
- What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?
- What are the instructor's strengths?
- What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?
- What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?

---

[157] Normandi Ellis is a Spiritualist minister, astrologer, and certified medium missionary through the Indiana Association of Spiritualists. Her thirteen published books include the spiritual classic, *Awakening Osiris*, translations from the hieroglyphs found in the Book of the Dead. You can find her at https://normandiellis.com/. I encourage you to make her acquaintance.

[158] Craig Hamilton, founder of Integral Enlightenment, is a pioneer in the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality and a leading voice in the movement for conscious evolution. For more information, go to https://integralenlightenment.com.

[159] The complete two-year curriculum can be found at https://www.onespiritinterfaith.org/our-programs/seminary/curriculum/.

Participants' answers can be found in Appendix G: Competencies Assessment.

Conclusion

Prayer leader and spiritual educator, are two labels I would never have used prior to completing my workshop. I now wear my "prayer warrior" bracelet authentically, knowing the source of my prayers lies within and that my journey gives me the understanding and compassion to companion others who desire to travel the same path.

CHAPTER 7
MY PRAYER, MY VOICE

January 2, 2018, thirteen months before my workshop launched, I woke up prepared to quit the DMin program. I was terrified that in spite of best efforts, I would come out on the other side of my project, no more comfortable with spoken prayer than when I started and even worse, would publicly humiliate myself. In time, however, the process of preparing to teach a workshop on spoken prayer, developing the curriculum, inviting people to participate as students and teachers, and finally delivering the workshop provided me with an immense sense of accomplishment, satisfaction and awe. I stepped well outside my comfort zone and found myself standing more fully in my identity as an Interfaith/Interspiritual minister; for that, I am forever grateful.

I was honestly surprised by the impact the workshop had on me and my volunteers; it was life changing, for most, if not all of us. Class participants shared their successes week after week. One member of the group prayed out loud for the first time at Sunday supper with her traditional Catholic family; another group member was starting to feel more at ease in the prayer circle she had recently joined; and one companion was able to sit at her mother's bedside in hospice and read aloud prayers/poems to her mother during her last days.

One story in particular impressed upon me the power of this project. I met S[160] at Nine Gates Esoteric School in the summer of 2018. She is a lifelong student of the great Mystery. S was one of my first volunteers and an instant supporter of my project idea. She participated in the first class then got sick with migraines and had to miss the next two classes. She attended the fourth and part of the fifth class then missed the sixth and seventh. The migraines were persistent and debilitating. On March 18, 2019, S sent me an email that included the following:

> It has been surprising to me the emotional turmoil I've experienced since this started. It has come clear to me that there is a deeper (unknown) reason for my resistance to praying aloud (which I believed was only in front of others). I realized I'm also unable to pray aloud when I'm by myself.
>
> The two times I was able to squeak out a "prayer" in group my throat tightened up so badly it hurt and I was in pain. I believe anticipating this is what brought on the migraines, anxiety, and other illness symptoms.

On March 22, 2019, S sent me a follow-up email where she explained that after further self-reflection and conversations with her daughter, she came to believe that the migraines were tied to the death of her 16-year-old son, 38 years earlier. She felt that she had been holding on to guilt associated with prayer and acceptance of her son's death. She shared with me in email and by phone that she had thought she was done grieving; she had no idea this grief and complicated relationship with prayer was still present. There was nothing to do or fix for S, all that was being asked of me was to witness. S thanked me for the class because it allowed her to heal wounds she was unaware she still had *and* she joined the group for our final class on March 25, 2019.

[160] S gave me permission to use her story and her words. Out of respect, I refer to her only as "S."

From the start, the class quickly took on its own energy and force that had nothing to do with me as the originator and everything to do with the power of community and intention and love. It was humbling to witness.

Even prior to the launch of the class in February 2019, as I was working on the curriculum, I could see that something special was taking shape. The course structure included different components and exercises, many opportunities for practice and sharing, and ritual and introspection. I also incorporated some teachings of my own during the first two weeks. I was feeling good about what I was creating and my colleagues at One Spirit encouraged me to submit a proposal for "Pray Like The Poets: Finding Your Voice" to be included in the Workshop Catalog for academic year 2019-2020.[161] I was notified in early 2019, that my proposal had been approved. Pray Like The Poets will be offered as a four-week online elective in January 2020, concluding on February 4. Perhaps it is only a coincidence that my doctoral project workshop started on February 4, 2019.

The greatest gift this journey has given me is that it returned me to my own heart, a little wiser than when I started. May I continue to turn inward, to listen for the still small voice whispering within my soul and to use my experiences in support of companioning others on the path. We are all just walking each other home.[162]

[161] One Spirit workshops are available to the public and fulfill elective requirements for seminary and spiritual counseling students.

[162] Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush, *Walking Each Other Home: Conversations on Loving and Dying* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2018).

Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu. “May all beings everywhere be happy and free, and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness and to that freedom for all.”[163]

[163] Andye Murphy, “What is the Meaning of Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu,” https://www.gaia.com/article/what-is-the-meaning-of-lokah-samastah-sukhino-bhavantu (accessed November 14, 2019).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Proposal

PRAY LIKE THE POETS:
FINDING YOUR VOICE

By

MANAR K. HIRMINA

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL
New York Theological Seminary
2018

Challenge Statement

As an Interfaith/Interspiritual minister, I am called upon to pray publicly. The challenge is how to pray with integrity and in my own voice. This demonstration project will involve an immersion in poetry and prayer in conjunction with an online prayer lab that I will lead. The end result will be a workshop on the art of prayer spoken simply in response to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray."

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

Spirituality is at the heart of the "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) movement. SBNR is a label used to identify the ever-growing population of Americans who distinguish spirituality from religion and often also carry negative feelings toward religious institutions (namely the church). Other, lesser used, labels include unchurched, unaffiliated, "spiritual and secular" and nones. The movement itself is not unified and as such there is no ministry or mission, creed or dogma.

History

Sven Erlandson was the first to coin the phrase and publish a book about the "spiritual but not religious" movement. His book, *Spiritual but Not Religious: A Call to Religious Revolution in America,* was released in 2000. His premise is that the SBNR phenomena is the result of the American movements of individualism, deconstruction, and anti-establishmentarianism which "culminated in the 1960s and '70s when nearly an entire generation left the church."[1] In 2001, on the heels of Erlandson's book, Dr. Robert C. Fuller released *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America.* Dr. Fuller posits that those who "describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious" are heirs of a historical and philosophical lineage that goes back as far as the colonial era."[2]

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[1] Sven Erlandson, *Spiritual but Not Religious: A Call to Religious Revolution in America* (San Jose, CA: Writer's Showcase, 2000), 3.

[2] Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10.

Jeff Carreira, author and mystical philosopher, writes that the SBNR "trend" has its roots in the secularization process that began with the Enlightenment.[3] He credits the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and William James (1842-1910) for inspiring the creation of the New Thought Churches in America as well as the hybrid "East meets West" spirituality that started in the 1950s and '60s[4] (and is commonplace today).

The SBNR classification includes people from all as well as no faith traditions and earlier books and articles present it as a movement that grew out of disenchantment with traditional Christian religious structures. While this may have been true in the past, Professor Linda Mercadante discovered while researching her latest book, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*, published in 2014, that this is one more myth surrounding present day SBNR. She goes on to call SBNR a new morality[5] and possibly the "most dramatic religious, intellectual and social change since Christendom took root in Europe."[6]

As the movement has evolved, the greatest change over the last twenty years is the attention the movement is getting from the outside: measuring and polling by groups like Pew Research and PRRI, books and articles written for and against the movement,

[3] See Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (https://www.iep.utm.edu/amer-enl/): Although there is no consensus about the exact span of time that corresponds to the American Enlightenment, it is safe to say that it occurred during the eighteenth century among thinkers in British North America and the early United States and was inspired by the ideas of the British and French Enlightenments. Based on the metaphor of bringing light to the Dark Age, the Age of the Enlightenment (*Siècle des Lumières* in French and *Aufklärung* in German) shifted allegiances away from absolute authority, whether religious or political, to more skeptical and optimistic attitudes about human nature, religion and politics.

[4] Jeff Carreira, "Ralph Waldo Emerson and The Origins of the Spiritual but Not Religious," https://jeffcarreira.com/ralph-waldo-emerson-origins-spiritual-not-religious/ (accessed March 11, 2018).

[5] Linda Mercadante, "Understanding the Spiritual but not Religious," https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/spiritual_not_religious.pdf, 29 (accessed March 4, 2018).

[6] Ibid., 43.

acknowledgement that the numbers are significant enough to view this group as a voting bloc, and the growing number of religiously unaffiliated organizations and centers that have opened to support the community's desire for spiritual exploration.

Beliefs

According to Dr. Mercadante, the core belief of individuals who identify as SBNR is that spirituality is personal, private, open, individualistic and core.[7] The ethos of the movement can be summed up as: "[it] rejects or minimizes organized religion, insists all religions are the same or equally limited, minimizes belief or practices "hybridity," highly individualistic, often non-theistic, experiments with monism, pantheism, paganism, dualism."[8] This is consistent with the findings of Mr. Erlandson and Dr. Fuller.

Many individuals who identify as SBNR would describe themselves as seekers. According to D. Patrick Miller, seeker and author, the greatest theological shift is one from God "out there" to God "in here." Likely as a result of the influence of Eastern traditions, the SBNR community generally believes in a God within – representing the greatest human potential available to us all.[9]

However, there is no universally embraced concept or definition of God or the nature of the Divine for those who self-identify as SBNR. One reason for the growth of the movement is that issues of theology are not debated – there is no right vs. wrong. According to Dr. Mercadante, regarding the topic of belief, the key is what they don't believe. She discovered that there is opposition to certain concepts associated with

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[7] Ibid., 34.

[8] Ibid., 8.

[9] D. Patrick Miller, "The Rapid Dying of Religion and the Rise of a Universal Spirituality," http://www.fearlessbooks.com/ReligionDying.htm (accessed March 17, 2018).

Christianity and other organized religions: exclusivism; truth; personal, self-conscious, intentional, involved, God; sin; and communal approach to spiritual growth.[10] The beliefs of SBNR are varied and combined in different ways for different people. Some believe in God and others believe in a "universal energy source."[11] Some believe that we are all one and others believe we're on our own or on par with nature. Some believe that we are energy beings having a human experience. These beliefs are not mutually exclusive – each person is free to customize their belief system and change it over time. In addition, there is a respect for mythology and a metaphorical approach to the Bible and other traditional sacred texts.

Programs

Individuals self-identify as SBNR and embrace practices/programs they feel enrich their spiritual lives; sometimes in community and sometimes through solitary endeavors. For many who identify as SBNR, spirituality can be found in all things and events/programs can range from silent meditation to movement and dance to chant, reading from a variety of scriptures, a lecture on quantum physics, or a trip through ancient ruins. Anything that speaks to the soul qualifies.

According to Dr. Siobhan Chandler, a Victoria, Canada-based sociologist of religion, "The Spiritual But Not Religious movement is driven by individualism, itself a product of an educated, socially progressive society that places a high value on freedom and choice."[12]

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[10] Mercadante, "Understanding the Spiritual but not Religious," 35.

[11] Ibid., 41.

[12] Katherine Gougeon, "The New New Age: "Spiritual But Not Religious," *Fashion Magazine*, December 2017, https://fashionmagazine.com/lifestyle/spiritual-but-not-religious/.

In my experience, there are three categories of programs that speak to and support the SBNR movement. The first classification of programs is intended to help people access their spirituality; these programs are as varied as the individuals themselves. Some people access their spirituality through silence so meditation retreats are appealing; silent retreats can be found at monasteries, temples, retreat centers, or spiritual centers. Others feel called to sing or chant – Bhakti festivals are very popular with several annual festivals around the country drawing thousands of people each year. All expressions of art are considered spiritual and it is not uncommon to find writing, painting or dance classes geared toward soul work or spiritual expression. Yoga is also a popular way for people who identify as SBNR to connect with spirituality and community through movement, meditation and/or breathwork. Not all yoga is spiritually oriented, however, so if one is seeking spirituality through yoga, they will need to do some research. Accessing spirituality through knowledge is known as Jnana yoga in the Hindu tradition and speaks to the western mind – a variety of classes are available at adult schools, traditional learning environments, spiritual centers and online. The internet has contributed tremendously to the SBNR movement by removing barriers to education and community for those seeking spirituality outside organized religion.

The second category of programs is action-based. Spiritual/sacred activism is not new – the abolitionists, suffragettes and civil rights workers were all spiritually grounded individuals who believed a different reality was necessary and possible. Today, spiritual or sacred activism is a way for people who identify as SBNR to unify for a change without joining a religious organization. The Network of Spiritual Progressives, based in Berkeley, CA, with 100 chapters around the US, is one such organization that is geared

toward people who want to participate in "calling forth the dream of the world we want."[13] The Network of Spiritual Progressives defines spiritual activism as "… working to create a loving, just, sacred, and sustainable world through means that are also loving, just, sacred, and sustainable. A spiritual activist practices empathy in word and deed as a way to build beloved communities and transform consciousness."[14] Another action-based organization that I'm familiar with is One Spirit in Action; the global service action arm of One Spirit Learning Alliance in New York City. These are just two examples of non-religious based organizations that embody the spirit of service.

The third category of programs is intended to create a sense of community. We are social creatures after all and another myth uncovered by Dr. Mercadante is that individuals who identify as SBNR are not loners in spite of the fact that they generally are not joiners.[15]

There is no shortage of programs around the country; in the New York area, one can look to the Open Center, Omega Institute, One Spirit Learning Alliance or United Palace for in-person or online offerings. For online experiences there are nearly an infinite number of podcasts to which one can subscribe and BrightStar Events is one example of a one stop shop for mind-body events around the globe. There are also churches and religious centers that are speaking to those who identify more as spiritual than religious. In NYC, one finds examples in Marble Collegiate Church and Romemu. Follow the bouncing ball around the World Wide Web and one will discover musicians,

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[13] Network of Spiritual Progressives, "Who We Are," https://spiritualprogressives.org/who-we-are/ (accessed March 17, 2018).

[14] Network of Spiritual Progressives, "Spiritual Activism," https://spiritualprogressives.org/philosophy/spiritual-activism/ (accessed March 17, 2018).

[15] Mercadante, "Understanding the Spiritual but not Religious," 16, 31.

scientists, philosophers, shamans, scholars, artists, preachers, teachers, healers and more who are speaking to the heart of the matter without attaching to dogma.

Symbols and Spaces

Symbols and images are important representations of people's beliefs. Some common images that represent spirituality without a religious affiliation include:

Other representations can include candles, incense, crystals, singing bowls of all sizes, stones, beads, items from nature, and musical instruments from around the world.

Any object or symbol that alludes to a traditional religion is generally not found in a gathering space for SBNR type events, unless there are a variety of objects representing many traditions and belief systems (see "coexist" above) – so if there's a cross, there may also be a star of David, possibly a Celtic knot or spiral, a star and crescent representing Islam, an ohm symbol, or perhaps the tree of life, some stones, water, a feather, a native American flute or a Hindu deity. The message being one of inclusion – all are welcome. The space itself can be anything.

Outdoor spaces are often used for SBNR events and the labyrinth is a common expression of spirituality untethered to a religion. Pagan symbols and stones are often found at locations used for spiritual practices but not always. And not surprisingly with the growing number of SBNR identified individuals, many churches, synagogues,

temples and mosques host events that are open to all and are not intended to proselytize or convert.

Demographics

Historically, the SBNR movement was thought of as white, female, and Protestant. The Pew Research survey of 2017[16] shows that today, individuals who identify as SBNR come from a broader segment of America. After interviewing 5002 individuals in the US over the age of 18, it was found that 27% of those surveyed can be categorized as spiritual but not religious – up 8% from 2012. Pew Research's method involved asking respondents by phone if they consider themselves to be "a religious person" and whether they consider themselves to be "a spiritual person."[17] "Spiritual but not religious" is the result of these two questions – affirmative to spiritual in combination with negative to religious.

Of the 27%, 37% are religiously unaffiliated, 35% are Protestant affiliated, 14% are Catholic and 11% are members of other faiths (Judaism, Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism). Consistent with the US public overall, women make up 53% and men make up 47% of the "spiritual but not religious." This is also consistent for race/ethnicity (see chart below). They are 70% Democratic or Independent as of 2017. In addition, "spiritual but not religious" individuals are more highly educated than the general public.

Consistent with Pew findings, in 2014, Steven Barrie-Anthony, wrote in *The Atlantic* that SBNR "…usually do care, and deeply, about community and civic

[16] Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, "More Americans Now Say They're Spiritual But Not Religious," Pew Research Center FactTank, September 6, 2017, http://pewrsr.ch/2xP0Y8w (accessed March 1, 2018).

[17] The methodology and survey questions can be found at http://pewrsr.ch/2xP0Y8w.

participation."[18] And while predominately Democratic or Independent, they don't vote as a single bloc tending toward the candidate who speaks to their spiritual issues – in 2016, it was Bernie Sanders. As Barrie-Anthony predicted in 2014, "Republicans are unlikely to wring much from spiritual voters; but Democrats stand to gain significantly, or lose out, depending on their ability to inspire them."[19]

'Spiritual but not religious' are more educated than U.S. public as a whole

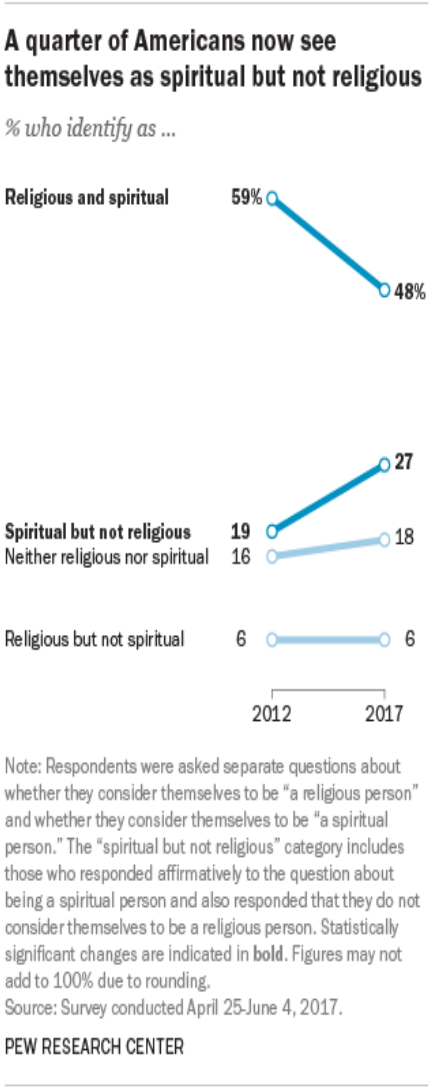
	U.S. adults	Religious and spiritual	Religious but not spiritual	Spiritual but not religious	Neither religious nor spiritual
	%	%	%	%	%
Men	48	45	55	47	62
Women	52	55	45	53	38
	100	100	100	100	100
White	65	64	55	55	63
Black	12	15	11	11	6
Hispanic	16	15	29	17	18
Other/mixed	8	5	4	10	13
	100	100	100	100	100
Age 18-29	22	15	25	22	30
30-49	34	29	29	36	36
50-64	26	31	17	30	20
65+	19	24	30	12	14
	100	100	100	100	100
High school or less	40	43	60	29	40
Some college	31	30	23	37	30
College graduate	28	27	16	34	30
	100	100	100	100	100
Rep/lean Rep.	41	44	34	30	23
Dem./lean Dem.	50	39	41	52	62
Ind./other/no lean	9	17	25	18	20
	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Shares in parentheses include only those who identify as Hispanic of any race. Results do not control for age and education. Percentages are column percentages. Respondents were asked separate questions about whether they consider themselves to be "a religious person" and whether they consider themselves to be "a spiritual person." The "spiritual but not religious" category includes those who responded affirmatively to the question about being a spiritual person and also responded that they do not consider themselves to be a religious person.
Source: Survey conducted April 25-June 4, 2017. Spanish adds data to polyethnic non-aggregated Pew Research Center survey conducted January-April, 2017. Data on sex, race/ethnicity, age and education from 2015 American Community Survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[18] Steven Barrie-Anthony, "'Spiritual but Not Religious': A Rising, Misunderstood Voting Bloc. No, They're Not Just Atheists," *The Atlantic*, January 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/01/spiritual-but-not-religious-a-rising-misunderstood-voting-bloc/283000/.

[19] Ibid.


A quarter of Americans now see themselves as spiritual but not religious
% who identify as ...
Religious and spiritual
59%
48%
Spiritual but not religious
19
27
Neither religious nor spiritual
16
18
Religious but not spiritual
6
6
2012
2017
Note: Respondents were asked separate questions about whether they consider themselves to be "a religious person" and whether they consider themselves to be "a spiritual person." The "spiritual but not religious" category includes those who responded affirmatively to the question about being a spiritual person and also responded that they do not consider themselves to be a religious person. Statistically significant changes are indicated in bold. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Survey conducted April 25-June 4, 2017.
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Site

For a traditional action-research project, the setting and site are one in the same. My site, however, will be virtual and will involve the use of Zoom video conferencing technology to bring people together to learn the art of spoken prayer. As noted above, location or physical space is not necessarily what draws SBNR people together. In addition, technology has become a common vehicle for engaging and growing a

community. One Spirit Learning Alliance uses Zoom to bring students from around the world into the classroom for an interactive learning experience. Many houses of worship from all traditions now live stream their services/events and entire conferences are now offered exclusively online. An inspiring example of how technology is being used to grow a spiritual community can be found in the work of Benedictine Sister Catherine Wybourne (a/k/a Digitalnun) who provides solace and inspiration to readers of her iBeneditine.org blog and her over 15,000 Twitter followers.[20]

Conclusion

There is a perception that people who identify are SBNR are averse to commitment, narcissistic, lazy and superficial. Some people even believe that SBNR equals atheist. In 1993, Jack Kornfield wrote in *A Path With Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*, that one should find one practice and teacher and commit deeply to it.[21] Reverend Lillian Daniel, author of *When "Spiritual But Not Religious" Is Not Enough,* is openly critical of the SBNR movement. Her position is that true spiritual growth takes place in community – a community of worship. The community is where one will be challenged and questioned and ultimately grow. Dr. Linda Mercadante's book, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious,* is an attempt to legitimize and explain the SBNR movement. As the research shows, SBNR is not going away and is a valid path for a growing number of people.

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[20] Jessica Abrahams, "Meet 'Digital Nun': The Sister Funding Her Monastery Through Her Apps," telegraph.co.uk, April 5, 2015, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11511596/Meet-digital-nun-the-Sister-funding-her-monastery-through-her-apps.html.

[21] Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart: A Guide through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 32.

While the movement is strong and growing, the challenge for those interested in serving the SBNR movement is that it is not an organized, unified group of individuals with a common goal. That means that one can't count on support (financial or otherwise) simply because one has a program, product or service that speaks to SBNR ideals. As a reminder, individuals who identify as SBNR tend to be highly individualistic and tend not to be "joiners." It is important to keep these data points in mind as I look to create my program which is geared to the hearts of the SBNR community.

CHAPTER 2
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

As an Interfaith/Interspiritual minister, I am called upon to pray publicly. The challenge is how to pray with integrity and in my own voice. This demonstration project will involve an immersion in poetry and prayer in conjunction with an online prayer lab that I will lead. The end result will be a workshop on the art of prayer spoken simply in response to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray."

According to legend, *Know Thyself* (*Gnothi Seauton*) was inscribed over the entranceway of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The desire to *know myself* is at the root of my challenge statement and the driving force behind my research project. When people find out that I'm an Interfaith/Interspiritual minister, they will sometimes ask if I would be willing to pray over a meal or as part of an event, and my reaction has been, "that's not my thing." I wanted to understand my resistance/reluctance, and then take steps to learn the art of spoken prayer so that I could step more fully into my ministry. I went into this project thinking this was just about me.

What has been interesting, however, is that once I started telling people that I was uncomfortable praying out loud and wanted to learn how, the common response was, "when you figure it out, please teach me." That was when I realized that my challenge was not mine alone. I had a teacher once who said if you want to know others, know yourself first.

Microcosm

I've learned over the years that prayer itself takes many forms and is no longer limited to the English Oxford Dictionary definition, "A solemn request for help or

expression of thanks addressed to God or another deity."[22] In common parlance, in today's world of spiritual seekers, prayer has come to mean any communion with the Divine, higher Self, Source, light within, Great Mystery, Oneness, etc. or any personal expression that connects one to an energy or feeling of being lovingly touched by something greater than oneself. This inability to nail down precise words is actually part of my challenge!

On the surface, my challenge is to whom am I praying and how do I address the object of my devotion? "God, the Father" no longer feels authentic to who I am as a spiritual being. God is no longer outside of myself, nor is this power/energy exclusively male. While my understanding of God is always evolving, I am of the belief that everything in existence is one with the ineffable and the ineffable is one with all of existence – the ultimate paradox, both/and.

I thought language was the extent of my challenge; however, it is only a portion of it. Knowing oneself requires digging beneath the surface challenge which is likely a symptom of something deeper. What I've learned on this journey is that my issue with prayer has many layers. Some history might be appropriate here. I grew up in the '70s and early '80s regularly attending an Episcopalian church until the age of 17. While my family considered themselves devotional and religious, I was not surrounded by prayer outside of church and within the church, the prayers were traditional and taken directly out of the prayer book. After my time in/with church, I practiced Islam for many years where prayers were generally taken from the Holy Quran. In both environments, expressions of devotion were traditional (i.e. patriarchal), subdued, and scripted. My

[22] English Oxford Dictionary, s. v. "prayer," https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/prayer (accessed April 15, 2018).

experience of prayer at that time of my life was that prayer was an appeal for help to a (male/father) God "out there."

Another aspect of prayer from my young life that I wasn't conscious of until recently, was my feeling that prayer was also an appeal to this "father God out there" to not only change our circumstances, but to change the people around us to make life easier for us. As a teenager and young adult who did not appreciate authority figures or being told what to do, my mother's words, "I'm praying for you," were internalized to mean she wanted me to change, I was not good enough. Having raised four teenagers myself, I now understand that was not the case. As a parent, you struggle with your powerlessness to protect your children and you want and need to believe there's a power greater than yourself "out there" keeping them safe in spite of their decisions. As an adult however, trying to understand my resistance to prayer, I realized that I viewed prayer as an imposition on one's will, a violation of one's boundaries, and/or a tool to change someone who makes your life difficult. I didn't want anything to do with the word or my version of the concept.

After my years with organized religion, I was exposed to and experienced the beauty and variety of faith traditions and philosophies from around the world and I came to value the many non-verbal and verbal ways to connect with Source. I attended One Spirit Interfaith Seminary to formalize my commitment to the divine source of all life and the spiritual path in a way that was aligned with the path I was already on. My hope was that I would come out on the other side at peace with the religion of my childhood and more comfortable praying. Seminary did point the way, but it was up to me to do the work and it's taken me four years since ordination just to get to this place. Prayer is now

calling me and won't take no for an answer. As I learned from Joseph Campbell, the heroine's journey ultimately leads her home.[23] She will be changed but she will return *on her own terms* (emphasis mine).

Within the microcosm, my personal challenges are (1) language, (2) not growing up with public prayer outside of religious institutions, and (3) emotional baggage from my associations with the word/concept of prayer.

Macrocosm

In 2014, Pew Research conducted a Religious Landscape Study survey of over 35,000 adults from all 50 states about their religious affiliations, beliefs and practices, and social and political views.[24] The data included in this proposal is drawn from the topline report[25] and the interactive links on the homepage of the study (see charts below for graphic representations of the data).

The study found that 89% of those surveyed believed in a God or a universal spirit.[26] When asked about attendance at religious services, 36% of those surveyed responded that they attend religious services at least once a week, 33% once or twice month/a few times a year, 30% attend seldom/never and 1% responded "don't know." Of the total number of respondents 52% meditate daily, weekly or monthly (45% seldom/never) and 77% pray daily, weekly, or monthly (23% seldom/never). However,

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[23] See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

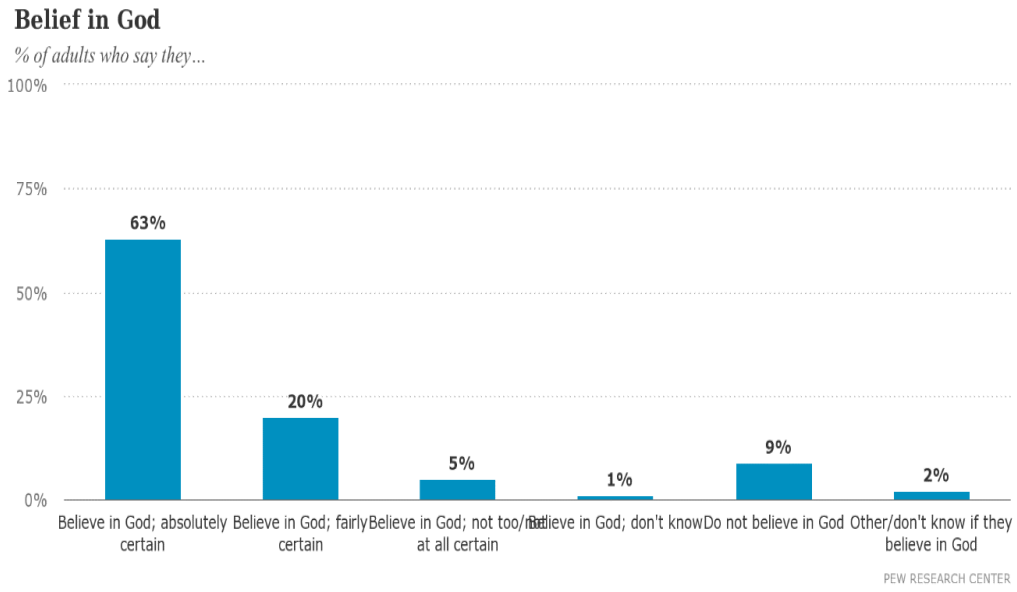
[24] Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study," http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/ (accessed April 15, 2018).

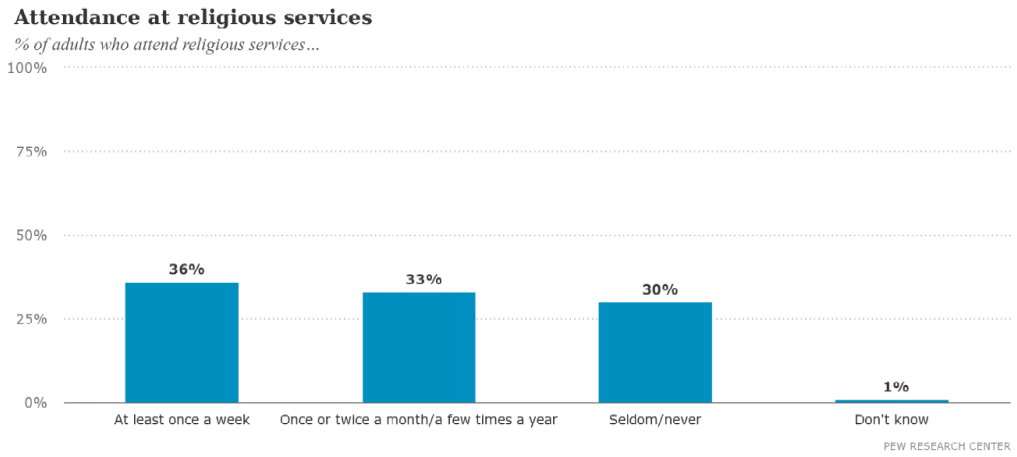
[25] Pew Research Center, "2014 Religious Landscape Study (RLS-II) Topline," June 4-September 30, 2014, http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/11/201.11.03_RLS_II_topline.pdf (accessed April 15, 2018).

[26] The study website and links only refer to "God," however, the actual questions posed to the participants in the study also included the words "universal spirit."

regarding frequency of participation in prayer, scripture study or religious education groups, 24% attend once per week, 9% once or twice per month, 8% several times per year and 58% seldom or never.

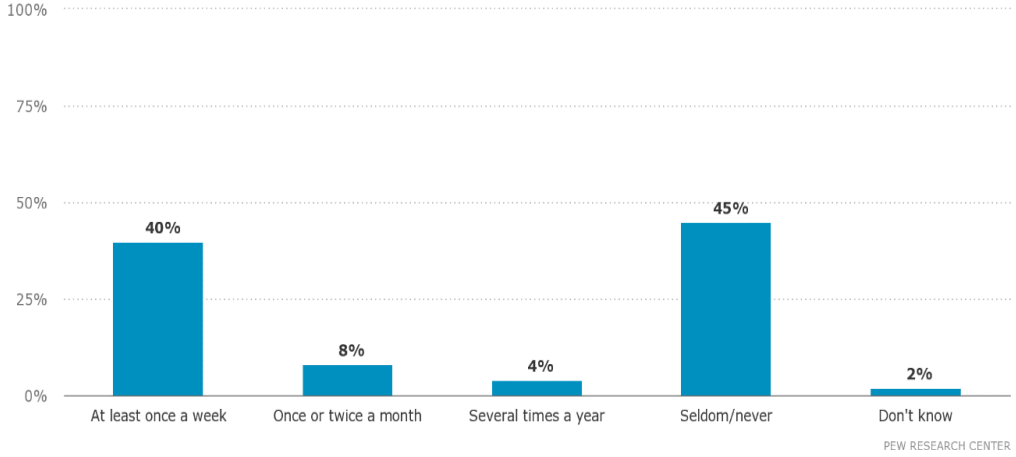
My interpretation of those numbers is that in 2014, the majority of Americans did believe in God or a universal spirit, may or may not have been attending religious services regularly, did pray and/or meditate regularly but did not participate in a prayer group. That would also have been an accurate description of me.





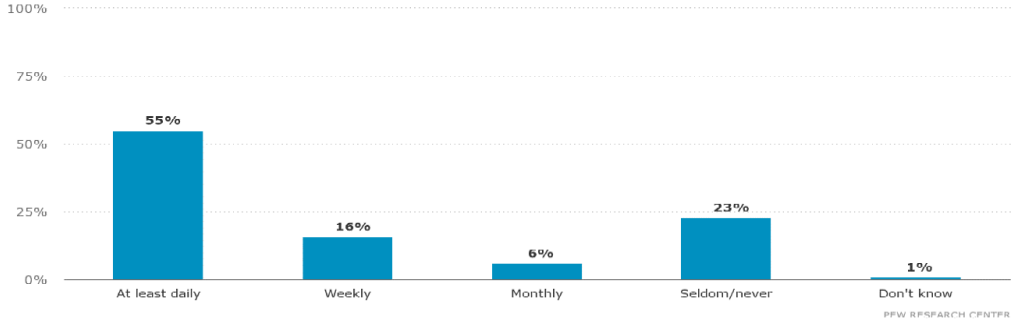
Frequency of meditation

% of adults who meditate…



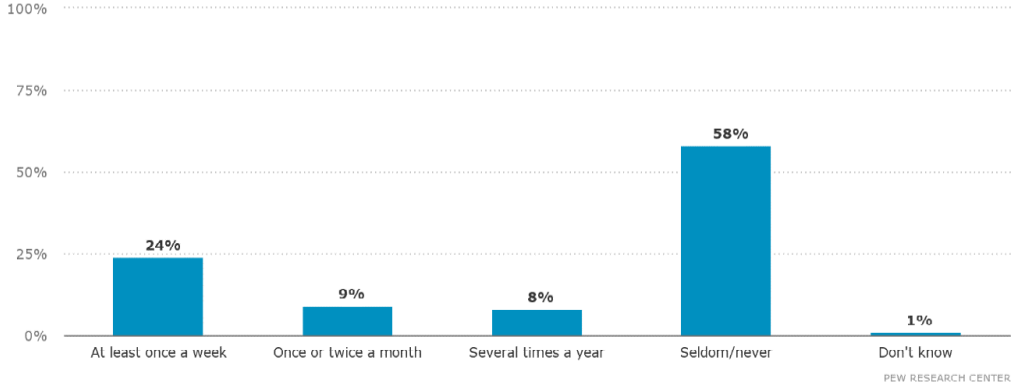
Frequency of prayer

% of adults who pray…



Frequency of participation in prayer scripture study or religious education groups

% of adults who attend prayer group…



To go more deeply into the prayer habits of Americans, I turn to Barna Group, "a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984."[27] In June 2017, Barna conducted an online survey with a nationally representative sample of 1,015 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older. The majority of respondents self-identified as Christian or past-Christian and the error rate associated with a sample size of 888 interviews is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.[28]

The researchers at Barna found that 79% surveyed had prayed at least once in the past 3 months. That was consistent with the findings of Pew Research. What I found most interesting is that 94% of them prayed alone and 82% prayed silently (13% prayed audibly). A small percentage (4%) prayed with either another person or group or with a church. In addition, 89% of praying adults pray to "God" – but Barna researchers acknowledge that "God" was not defined, 50% of the respondents pray to Jesus, and 23% pray to the Holy Spirit. The remaining percentages were allocated as shown below. Prayer in America appears to be prevalent, personal, private, and silent.

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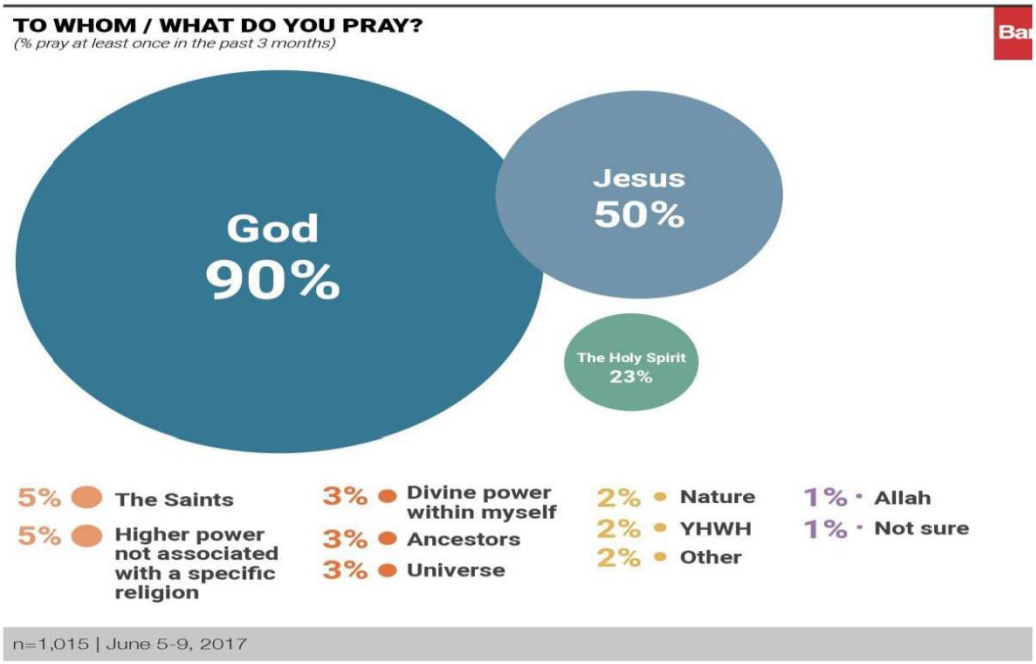
[27] Barna Group, https://www.barna.com (accessed April 15, 2018).

[28] Barna Group, "Silent and Solo: How Americans Pray," Research Releases in Faith & Christianity, August 15, 2017, https://www.barna.com/research/silent-solo-americans-pray/ (accessed April 15, 2018).



Conclusion

This project is not intended to convince anyone of the power of prayer – it is geared toward those who want to pray and specifically, pray out loud at public gatherings. There are many circumstances where one might want to pray out loud and it feels that as one gets older, more circumstances arise. It is very common to pray publicly at a family meal, with loved ones in times of celebration or sorrow, with a sick friend, or simply to express gratitude in community. Ministers and spiritual counselors are routinely asked to pray at public gatherings. I have come to believe that whether one prays to God, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, Allah, YHWH, Nature, Mother/Father God, one's own Higher Self, the Ancestors or nothing at all, prayer is powerful. I have witnessed firsthand how a gratitude practice can change someone's perception and experience of their outer world practically overnight.

The challenge for many of us is that we do pray but usually not in groups and not likely out loud. If the macrocosm and microcosm are reflections of one another, then my longing to pray publicly, in a new way and with ease, is likely a shared longing.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

At the heart of my research project are fundamentally two questions: what constitutes spoken prayer and how does one learn the art? I decided to approach the first question through the two lenses of scripture and sacred language, or what I'm calling poetry.

Research Question #1

What is the essence of scriptural prayers found in sacred texts across the contemporary faith traditions? Do traditional prayers have a structure and are there common themes? How do they differ, if at all? When are these prayers commonly recited? Who recites the prayers – lay people, clergy, monastics, etc.? What additional non-verbal rituals are associated with the recitation?

I am researching scriptural prayers in order to understand the language of formal prayer. I believe my research will guide/refine my questions and delivery of the material. I will begin with cornerstone prayers from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, then write a compare/contrast and also build upon this table. I am intentionally limiting this to contemporary faith traditions.

Prayer	Source	Tradition
The Shema	Torah	Judaism
The Lord's Prayer	New Testament (Matthew 6:9-13)	Christianity
Al-Fatiha	Holy Quran (Surah 1)	Islam
Gayatri Mantra	Rig Veda (Mandala 3.62.10)	Hinduism
Metta Prayer from Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Buddha's Words on Loving-kindness	Khuddakapāṭha (Khp 9)	Buddhism

I need to remain mindful that this is not about interpretation of the prayers – I will be taking the prayers at face value and not delving into metaphor or possible deeper truths. Scriptural prayer for many of us is what we start out hearing as children attending worship services. These are the prayers that we memorize – I'm interested in the structure as a starting point for the discussion around what constitutes spoken prayer and how does one learn to pray out loud using one's own voice.

Research Question #2

What delineates sacred language? How does one know when something is prayer? Are there markers to sacred speech? What role does context play?

How is it that some poems feel like a healing balm upon the heart while others don't? If a poem or reading that is used to bless a family meal is read to a child at bedtime, does it lose its sanctity?

To get to the heart of these questions, I will delve into poetry, the writings of the mystics, stories from indigenous traditions and the research of those who have previously explored similar questions. I expect that the answers will guide the curriculum for the Pray Like the Poets workshop. What is it that I'm trying to learn and then teach? I am admittedly venturing into this portion of the research expecting to find signposts that distinguish the sacred from the secular with respect to language. My secret hope is that

there aren't and we are each free to express ourselves to the Divine, as we understand her or him, as our hearts choose.

Research Question #3

How does one teach spiritual practices? What is the best way to leverage web conferencing technology? Can something as personal as prayer be taught?

I'll be looking to spiritual learning centers like One Spirit Learning Alliance, Open Center and Omega Institute for best practices and guidance. Specifically, I need to determine the appropriate length of my workshop in its two versions, as an in-person, day-long or weekend event and an online web event offered over a period of time.

CHAPTER 4
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: To increase awareness and be able to articulate a relationship with prayer and specifically with spoken prayer which may include acknowledgment of past resistance and wounding

- **Strategy 1:** Self-Reflection: participants will be asked to (1) complete a pre-class assessment that includes a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) and (2) journal their reflections on why they have volunteered for this project. The invitation will include the opportunity to reflect on their relationship to prayer, any resistance they feel toward praying publicly and any stories they hold around the subject of prayer or the word, "prayer." Suggested questions for contemplation: how do I feel when I hear or say the word, "prayer"; what word would I use to describe my feeling; if prayer were a person, what would I say to it and what is it saying to me; do I feel differently about spoken prayer versus silent prayer?
- **Strategy 2:** Power of Voice: participants will be invited to read their reflections to the group. If they are uncomfortable sharing their writings, they can share words or phrases that revealed themselves during the process. I will capture common themes and areas of intersection.
- **Strategy 3:** Power of Naming: the group will engage in an open discussion on the common themes; sharing their experiences and feelings associated with "prayer."

Evaluation of Goal 1: Participants will complete a questionnaire where they capture their discoveries and "aha" moments (if any).

Goal 2: To expand the discussion beyond traditional prayers in order to move in the direction of using poetry and prose as vehicles for soulful expression in addition to offer an opportunity to practice speaking in front of a group

- **Strategy 1:** At the close of the first class, I will provide participants with a list of authors whose work I feel speak to the soul so that participants can expand their own library and have a starting point for their first assignment. I will ask participants to come to the second class with several selections written by someone else – prose, poetry, essays, excerpts from a novel – anything that touches their heart. They will be asked to come prepared to read aloud and share why they were touched by this particular writing – what made it feel like a prayer or sacred writing.
- **Strategy 2:** Beginning with the second class, participants will be asked to read aloud the writings they brought, to share their process of finding and choosing what they brought, including how the writings made them feel, and to hold space for the sharing by their peers.
- **Strategy 3:** After everyone has had an opportunity to read, the group will be invited to share how it felt to read, to be witnessed and to listen. I'm interested in understanding from the participants what touched them, if they felt less anxiety reading a poem written by someone else that they chose in advance, and how the experience compared to reciting and hearing what we traditionally define as prayers.

Evaluation of Goal 2: I will track the engagement level of the participants using a tracker. I will capture whether or not each person brought readings and if they chose to read their work. I will capture highlights shared by each of the participants.

Goal 3: To develop comfort with the thinking and writing process of prayer that will include the writing and the reading out loud of prayers in the individual's own voice

- **Strategy 1:** Three guest teachers will be invited to teach the class at weeks three, five, and seven. They will teach on technique and engage the class in experiential practice.
- **Strategy 2:** Participants will be encouraged to keep a journal based on weekly themes. Weeks four, six, and eight will provide opportunities for participants to read their own writings to the class. They will be asked in advance to spend time in the days preceding class, writing variations of poems, prose, and/or prayers in their own voice to be shared during class with the group. If this feels too intimidating, they will always have the option of sharing something written by someone else.
- **Strategy 3:** At weeks two, four and six, participants will be encouraged to provide positive feedback to each speaker – highlighting what touched them and how the prose, poetry or prayer made them feel. This time of sharing and appreciation is intended to increase the sense of safety in the group.

Evaluation of Goal 3: Participants will complete an end of workshop, self-assessment which will include the same VAS from the pre-workshop assessment and where they will capture if/how their inner state shifted during the eight-week class.

CHAPTER 5
MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

My site team consists of Rev. Dr. Jose Roman, Rev. Leslie Reambeault, Tammy Satterlee, Yvonne Lucia and Erika Joyner. We met using Zoom video technology on March 29, 2018 and reviewed all 14 multifaith competencies. They challenged me to think beyond my current thinking and demonstrated how nearly all of the 14 competencies presented below could be deepened for this project/process. I was then left to contemplate their feedback and choose the two that called to me. My site team's recommendations are incorporated below and the two I chose are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Assessment of Candidate Competency

1. Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition

A multifaith minister must be knowledgeable about his or her own faith tradition, capable of interpreting it accurately in a wider multifaith context, and able to encourage others within the tradition to grow in faith and understanding.

Site Team recommendation: develop. My site team spent quite a bit of time on this competency and even suggested changing the word "tradition" to the word "path." They felt very strongly that it would serve me well to focus on defining and refining how I define my faith tradition/path. While I don't disagree that there is value in being able to articulate one's beliefs and path, I don't believe that I need to do that in the context of

this project beyond identifying myself as an Interfaith/Interspiritual minister who identifies as spiritual but not religious (SBNR).

2. Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions

A multifaith minister must also be knowledgeable and show appreciation for faith traditions that are not his or her own. She or he must be capable of demonstrating how an appreciation of the other in particular is grounded in one's own faith tradition, capable of hearing and responding to the value of faith traditions of others, and able to encourage others to grow within a wider multifaith context.

Site Team recommendation: continue. My site team acknowledged me for having a knowledge and appreciation of many of the world's faith traditions and philosophies. My intention is to continue to grow in that knowledge and understanding.

3. Ability to engage productively in dialogue

Ministry in a multifaith context necessarily requires an ability to engage in dialogue with other faith traditions, and with those who hold different faith commitments. Dialogue requires openness to the other and ability to respond honestly in a way that creates a sense of community that transcends the differences. Dialogue does not necessarily have as its objective removal or erasure of boundaries between traditions, but it does entail border crossing. The goal of dialogue is not necessarily agreement, but greater understanding on the side of all involved.

Site Team recommendation: continue. My site team acknowledged that as an Interfaith/Interspiritual minister, I practice engaging in dialogue with people of all faith traditions. This is part of my training and ongoing practice.

4. Ability to interpret sacred texts

Using appropriate language, with sensitivity to the texts and identities of others, and demonstrating effectiveness in communicating one's ideas, an interpreter of sacred texts presents researched, organized, well-prepared, sermons or other similar forms of proclamation that are relevant and challenging to the listener's life and spiritual development.

Site Team recommendation: change from "interpret" to "engage with" and continue. This was an area where my site team felt I am comfortable engaging with sacred texts from a variety of traditions and would organically over time, learn more.

5. Ability as worship leader

While worship is rarely, if ever, multifaith in character, it is often conducted in a multifaith context. A worship leader who is sensitive to multifaith realities is responsible for conducting structured or formal aspects of worship – its sacraments or ordinances, its variety of rites, its arts of worship – with sensitivity to differences. The leader presents the sacraments or ordinances as a living sign of the presence of the holy, with meaningful confession, prayer and praise as appropriate. But he or she cannot assume that these symbols are directed only toward the members of one's own faith community. He or she must be able to plan and lead worship services that reflect an awareness and active engagement with others traditions and commitments of the diverse faith communities.

Site Team recommendation: focus on the prayer segment of worship service and develop/attention. This is one of the reasons this project is so personal and close to the heart. I would very much like to develop my skills as a prayer leader. I will do this by (1) immersing myself in prayers and poetry – with daily readings, preferably out loud, (2) writing prayers and starting a personal prayer journal, and (3) keeping a personal journal

that tracks my progress through the resistance to prayer that led me to this project initially.

6. Facilitating transformation

Prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptural tradition is more than a matter of ecstatic speech uttered through the power of the Spirit (although it is this), and much more than merely telling the future (although it certainly has a strong eschatological dimension). A prophet is one who does not "foretell" so much as "forth-tell" the truth, doing so in such a way as to communicate the divine or transcendent passion for love and justice. As a prophet, a multifaith minister speaks the truth in love, communicates an awareness of social injustices, and sensitizes others to spiritual and ethical implications of various structures and practices in the church/synagogue/mosque/religious community, and in the wider society.

Site Team recommendation: attention. While this is not a competency I will focus on specifically in this project, my site team did not want me to lose sight of the fact that prayer can be a place for prophetic voice. Prayer can be a place that inspires action and has traditionally been a way to speak prophecy.

7. Ability as multifaith leader

A leader is one who creates an environment in which a variety of gifts may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the sensitivity to share resources.

Site Team recommendation: continue. My site team acknowledged that this is a strength that will serve me in this project.

8. Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator

A religious educator challenges the hearer to discover new resources within her or himself and others. He or she invites others to a new and more spiritually-enlightened consciousness about self and society. With creativity and courage, he or she prompts us to ask new questions and work toward healing, reconciliation and justice. Such a challenge elicits personal growth in the gifts of the Spirit, which in turn overflow into the life of the community.

Site Team recommendation: change "religious" to "spiritual" and develop. I have created workshops at work and look forward to honing my skills in a spiritual and online environment. I come from a family of educators – so this is definitely a skill that I want to leverage in this project and in the future. I will do this by (1) educating myself on the best practices for creating workshops and trainings for spiritual development (including appropriate length of workshop and the use of video conferencing technology), (2) learning from others by participating in workshops to experience how others in the field of spiritual development deliver a training experience, and (3) developing the curriculum for this project.

9. Ability as counselor in a multifaith context

Counseling is concerned with the work of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. In performing these tasks, the counselor has the privilege of walking with others on their inner journey toward wholeness. The effectiveness of any form of counseling is always contingent on the pastor, rabbi or other religious leader. Whatever model or theory one chooses to guide one's practice, it is imperative that the counselor be

capable of establishing creative relationships that can help others become more whole. To the degree that the counselor is open, genuine, free, self-accepting and growing, she or he will foster these qualities in others.

Site Team recommendation: continue. While not specifically relevant to this project, I will continue to leverage my skills as an Interspiritual counselor as I engage with participants in the project.

10. Spiritual Leader

Ministers are spiritual leaders of the community. As such, they are expected to be able to communicate effectively to others spiritual presence and power. To do so, however, they must first be themselves grounded in spiritual disciplines, and regularly exercising personal spiritual practices.

Site Team recommendation: the original site team recommendation was to combine competencies 5, 8 and 10 into one competency as they are all required for this project. For the sake of simplicity, I will be focusing on 5 and 8 with this competency always in the background. I will continue my personal spiritual practices throughout my educational journey.

11. Witness

Various religious traditions understand the role of ministry beyond the borders of their community differently, but one of the common ways this is understood is through the symbol or practice of bearing witness. In bearing witness in both word and deed, a minister often extends the fundamental message of faith beyond the immediate boundaries of his or her own immediate religious community. Such activities need to be judged as to whether they are good news not just by those who are the insiders of a particular faith tradition, but by those who are on the outside as well. When carried out

effectively, the witness that is made is truly experienced as life-giving by all who give it and receive it.

Site Team recommendation: develop. In my language, bearing witness is "holding space." It is my responsibility as a spiritual educator to ensure that participants feel safe and seen. One site team member said it was important to notice, name and nourish. In addition, my site team will bear witness to my evolution. While I will not be focusing on this competency in the context of this project, it will be in my heart throughout.

12. Administrator

Administration is virtually a universal religious practice. An administrator is able to define and analyze a task or problem succinctly and clearly, establish concrete and realistic goals, develop strategies which flow out of these goals and initiate a clear, on-going process of evaluation. She or he communicates a sense of mission which sees each task as part of the whole life of the congregation and establishes a collegial environment in which the gifts of others are expressed. Through it all, there is precision, accuracy, organization and purpose. One senses that time is well spent, that efforts are not duplicated, and that efficiency is balanced against other competing factors.

Site Team recommendation: continue (bring it). This is a skill I have and it's a given that it will be leveraged for this project.

13. Organizer

A community organizer is more than someone who can create the grounds for social change. A community organizer is one who learns the community, and helps the community come to know itself. Organizing is a task that everyone in ministry must engage in some way. Multifaith community organizing entails a special ability to organize not within but across religious boundaries in ways that crosses them responsibly

while empowering people to work together for change that will bring a greater measure of common good.

Site Team recommendation: skip. This skill is not relevant to this project.

14. Professional

The professionalization of ministry is sometimes lamented but understood properly the minister as professional is one who realizes excellence in his or her calling. Among the skills that undergird the performance of ministry, those of the professional cannot be discounted.

Site Team recommendation: continue. Pursuing my doctorate is a continuation of the professionalism of ministry.

Competencies Chosen for Development

Competency One: Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator

A religious educator challenges the hearer to discover new resources within her or himself and others. He or she invites others to a new and more spiritually-enlightened consciousness about self and society. With creativity and courage, he or she prompts us to ask new questions and work toward healing, reconciliation and justice. Such a challenge elicits personal growth in the gifts of the Spirit, which in turn overflow into the life of the community.

Prayer is a spiritual practice. For my purposes, I will change the wording to read: **Ability to serve as a spiritual educator.** My objective is to develop and deliver a workshop that will increase the confidence and competency of the participants to pray out loud by accessing their own inner wisdom.

Strategies:

- (1) I will educate myself on the best practices for creating workshops and trainings for spiritual development (including appropriate length of workshop and the use of video conferencing technology).
- (2) I will learn from others by participating in workshops to experience how others in the field of spiritual development deliver a training experience.
- (3) I will develop the curriculum for the workshop.

Evaluation:

At the conclusion of the class, the participants will complete a workshop evaluation tool which will include an assessment of my proficiency as a spiritual educator.

Competency Two: Ability as worship leader

While worship is rarely, if ever, multifaith in character, worship is often conducted in a multifaith context. A worship leader who is sensitive to multifaith realities is responsible for conducting structured or formal aspects of worship – its sacraments or ordinances, its variety of rites, its arts of worship – with sensitivity to differences. The leader presents the sacraments or ordinances as a living sign of the presence of the holy, with meaningful confession, prayer and praise as appropriate. But he or she cannot assume that these symbols are directed only toward the members of one's own faith community. He or she must be able to plan and lead worship services that reflect an awareness and active engagement with others traditions and commitments of the diverse faith communities.

I see this as the area where my site team and participants in the prayer lab will assess my competency as a leader in general and with prayer specifically. While we won't be conducting a full-blown worship service, we are coming together to pray which is an expression of worship and an aspect of most worship services.

Strategies:

- (1) I will immerse myself in prayers and poetry – with daily readings, preferably out loud
- (2) I will write prayers and start a personal prayer journal
- (3) I will keep a personal journal that tracks my progress through the resistance to prayer that led me to this project initially.

Evaluation:

(1) This competency will be assessed leveraging a simple visual analogue scale and recording my anxiety/distress level over a period of 18 months, starting with my feelings when asked to pray at NYTS in October 2017 and concluding in April 2019 at the conclusion of my project.

		Oct. 2017	Feb. 2018	June 2018					
	No Distress								
	Mild Distress			x					
	Moderate Distress								
	Severe Distress		x						
	Very Severe Distress	x							

(2) The workshop evaluation tool that will be completed for competency one above will also include questions regarding my effectiveness as a prayer leader.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TIMELINE

Date	Task/Activity	Person Responsible
September 2018	Proposal to Editor	Self
October 2018	Proposal to NYTS	Self
November 2018	Recruit participants for project	Self
October 2018 – January 2019	Recruit teachers for project	Self
December 2018 – January 2019	Complete Research Questions	Self
January 2019	Complete Workshop Curriculum and Assessment Tools	Self
February - March 2019	Project	Self
April – December 2019	Complete Dissertation	Self
December 2019	Dissertation to Editor	Self
February 1, 2020	Dissertation to NYTS	Self
March 2020	Prepare Oral Presentation	Self
April 2020	Oral Presentation	Self

APPENDIX B: BUDGET

Date	Task	Budget
September 2018	Proposal Editor	$250
October 2018	Proposal Copying and Binding	$500
January 2019	Zoom Subscription	$180/year
December 2019	Dissertation Editor	$1500
February 2019	Fees to teachers	$900

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Appendix B: Inspirational Talk

Pray? Who me?

(After playing Help! by the Beatles <2:23> ….)

That was the Beatles asking for help. I feel like I should say that in an Ed Sullivan voice. That song is an indication of where we're going today.

But let me first tell you how I got here—to this topic on this day. I had this bizarre dream recently—not an unusual occurrence for me. I was alone and in a dangerous predicament (once again). I wasn't afraid exactly, but I did know something was very wrong and I was struggling in the dream to figure out how to correct the situation. I couldn't figure out who to call for help because in "real life" I didn't know anyone with the needed skill set and I couldn't figure out how I was going to get myself out of the mess I was in. When I couldn't come up with the solution, I woke myself up. It wasn't going to end well—so why bother staying asleep? It was very unsettling and I had no idea what it meant. I was initially embarrassed by the dream—and didn't want to tell anyone—I was convinced that it meant that I was doing something wrong in my waking life—I was taking the dream very literally. But I couldn't shake it—it was one of those dreams that linger throughout the day.

A day or so later, I mentioned the dream to a very wise friend and he suggested that I ask for clarity before going to sleep that night and see what is revealed. Then he told me about an intuitive he admires who told him that we all need to ask for help more often—from whatever higher power or state of higher consciousness we believe in. He passed this wisdom on to me just as a sharing- no agenda and without trying to answer my questions about my dream.

I thought about it all day; pondering the connection between my dream and his wisdom. And I realized that THAT was the whole message of the dream! I needed to ask for help. So, I started a daily practice of asking for help, out loud, and within a few days, some things in my life that had been stressing me out all seemed to fall into place and I felt a weight lifted off my shoulders—I could breathe so much easier.

Then I remembered how I read in Lorna Byrne's book, Angels in My Hair, that the angels told her that most of them are unemployed because we don't ask for their help. They can't intercede if we don't ask and give them permission. So, there are all these great souls just waiting for an opportunity to step in and help us!

Excellent, I thought, I'll use my recent real life experience to build my inspirational talk for today—it'll be about the power of asking for help. I had obviously hit on a gold mine, right? We should all be asking for help more- there are souls waiting to help us- wouldn't everyone's life be so much simpler—more easeful—if we all just asked for help? Felt like a big deal to me and something that I wanted to share. So I started telling people the story - the dream, my friend's advice, the connection to the dream, the days of practice

after … and how it all evolved into the theme for today's worship service—because I thought it was such a cool story and I thought maybe I'd get more stories in response that I could add to today's talk.

Yeah, not so much, because I discovered something interesting… each person I told assumed I was talking about asking other **people** for help. The typical response I got was, "It's hard for me to ask for help but I hear what you're saying and I should probably do that more." They weren't even impressed by how my friend's advice provided the key to the dream or how several days of practice took away some of my stressors. My friends are hard to impress- but even worse, it felt like they weren't understanding me and didn't get what I was talking about.

That I didn't get. I mean, I'm talking about spiritual people - people who like me, at a minimum believe that there's a higher power (outside or within us) who will respond to our requests—you know, the Universe with a capital U that everyone talks about as a way of not saying the G word (*whisper: God*). Some of them even believe in Angels and Spirit Guides- so why was their first thought that I was suggesting they /we ask for help from another person?

I left it alone as the worship service evolved and took shape. But it bothered me that I wasn't able to communicate more clearly.

I continued to wonder why when I suggested asking for help, their first thought went to another person… what was that all about?

Then it hit me! It was one of those OMG moments… I have the same hang up as most Americans my age—the word Prayer is a trigger for me. And asking for help—from a higher power—is nothing more than a euphemism for Prayer—so without realizing it, I was suggesting that people should pray! Oh my God! I had become my mother! And the people I was talking to—couldn't wrap their minds around the idea of praying, so asking for help by default had to be from other embodied humans. Bingo.

If you don't mind, I'd like to unpack this for you a little more… because some version of this may be your story—and if not you, maybe someone you know….

This is the image that goes with the cringing feeling that the word prayer brings up in me…. imagine my elderly Egyptian grandmother (think black and white photo), dressed in black since her husband passed away in 1965, carrying her tiny bible around all the time, walking timidly around my parents' house, trying not to make any noise, feeling like life is out of her control, always on the verge of tears and praying silently or out loud every minute of every day. Every other word out of her mouth in response to anything was either Jesus or God (in Egyptian, obviously). Truthfully, I don't know if that's what she was really like, but that's my memory of her from my childhood and that looked and felt very pathetic to this Americanized kid. There's my judgment making its appearance, but that's another talk for another day (hand gesture: putting it to the side).

So, here's how my young mind interpreted what I saw - old women pray—young people take the bull by the horns and make things happen—on their own—without help from anyone—at least in *this* country. And my macho father did not pray or ask for help in any country. So there.

Now …. where does that leave me and all who are like me? My wise friend suggested I ask for help. Lorna says angels are just waiting to help us- but we have to ask…. And generally, when I do ask for help—and stay open to receiving—I am not disappointed. My son would probably say, "just get over yourself, mom." Maybe he's right (again). I have to ask myself, am I going to let my childhood images and baggage get in the way of a more easeful life? Basically, in the most simplistic terms - am I going to turn down free help!? I don't think so! Most days, I can use all the help I can get. What about you? Are you going to turn down free help because you don't like to ask for help or because you have hang-ups with the word, "prayer"?

Forgive me for going off course a bit, but I needed to connect some dots and name the elephant in the room and call this what it is … I'm going to talk today about asking for help, I'm going to talk about prayer. I'm going to share with you what a few great teachers say and the different ways they talk about prayer in our modern spiritual language. My hope is that the inspiration and tenderness of these great teachers will heal some of our wounds and pave the way for us to want to incorporate this very powerful practice into our daily lives. And if you don't have issues with the word or the practice, then maybe you know someone who does and you can pass along the wisdom.

So, deep breath in, we're jumping into the deep end … and please forgive me if I go back and forth between using the word prayer and referring to it as asking for help… I don't want to alienate any of you and if you're like me, you may still cringe a little at the word. We'll just have to ask for help getting over ourselves. :)

So back to the Beatles…
They were just kids when they released that song in 1965, but it was written for the movie by the same name and this is the verse that spoke to me when I heard it again recently:

When I was younger, so much younger than today
I never needed anybody's help in any way (sound familiar or was that just me?)
But now these days are gone I'm not so self-assured
Now I find I've changed my mind, I've opened up the doors (uh, yeah, me too)

Why do we tend to only get more comfortable asking for help in the 2nd half of life? Paraphrasing Father Richard Rohr, he says that in the second half of life, we have nothing to prove and don't need to be right anymore.

So, it appears, following that logic, that asking for help is perhaps an admission of our humanity and vulnerability—but let me add from now—it's not a sign of weakness. I'm talking primarily to myself, but if it also feels like I'm talking directly to you - I am. :)

Continuing with the connection between prayer and the second half of life … Rami Shapiro wrote these words. They're quoted in Mike Comins' book, "Making Prayer Real".

I had no need to pray to God, for there was no Other "out there" to whom to pray. Meditation made more sense and I took that up with a vengeance. Yet after decades of sitting on cushions and, as I got older, chairs, I felt called to pray. Something was missing in the silence of meditation. While formal prayer for me was a musical score without rests, and hence merely noise, meditation had become a score without notes, and hence merely quiet. I valued the silence, but I wanted the sound. I wanted to talk to God…

Formal prayer, that's what most of us grew up with, "a musical score without rests"—whah whah whah whah whah whah whah—(teacher from Charlie Brown) - merely noise… and meditation a score without notes. I valued the silence, but I wanted the sound… I wanted to talk to God.

I wanted to talk to God. What a powerful longing. I can relate to those words—maybe you can, too. I don't know if this is a universal story, but there appears to be a theme here of turning back to God in later years. Maybe that's all I was seeing as a child… my grandmother, a woman in the second half of her life, talking to God. Sounds like she was in good company with Fr. Rohr and Rami Shapiro.

Going back to Father Richard Rohr for a minute:

I want to share with you an excerpt from his meditation called Our Prayers Create Us. The complete meditation is printed for you in your bulletin.

When we celebrate New Year's Day, and maybe Easter too, we celebrate a symbolic rebirth of time. We somehow hope for God to do new things with us and for us. We wait for the coming of grace, for the unfolding of Mystery. We wait for the always-bigger Truth.

But we cannot just wait. We must pray too, which is to expect help from Another Source. Our prayers then start both naming us and defining us. When we hear our own prayers in our own ears and our own heart, we start choosing our deepest identity, our biggest future, and our best selves. We fall into our own hidden wholeness.

(Adapted from *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*, p. 154 if you're looking for the original source)

I want to read that again—*But we cannot just wait. We must pray too, which is to* ***expect*** *help from Another Source. Our prayers then start both* ***naming*** *us and* ***defining*** *us. When*

we hear our own prayers in our own ears and our own heart, we start choosing our deepest identity, our biggest future, and our best selves. We fall into our own hidden wholeness.

Our prayers define us—they name us—they come from deep within us and show us to ourselves. So powerful. Through our prayers, we choose our deepest identity and our best selves. Wow!

These are not whiney, needy, pleas to a power outside of ourselves—(bear with me as I'm still working through my issues, here).

Let's continue exploring… Here's a short poem by Hafiz…

Out of This Mess

Pray to be humble
So that God does not have to appear to be so stingy
O pray to be honest, Strong, Kind, And Pure,
So that the Beloved is never miscast as a cruel great miser.
I know I have a hundred complex cases against God in court,
But never mind, wayfarer, let's just get out of this mess
And pray to be loving and humble
So that the Friend will be forced to reveal

Himself…. So…. Near!

What is our dear friend Hafiz telling us? I think he's saying that if we don't ask—he says pray—if we don't ask - we deprive God of showing his (or her) generosity, grace and nearness to us.

If I may paraphrase…

Just ask - so that God does not have to appear to be so stingy.

Just ask- so that God will reveal herself…so… near. Thank you, Hafiz.

Eric Butterworth, modern day Unity minister titled one of his books, "The Universe is Calling, Opening to the Divine through Prayer".

The first part of the dedication to his book reads as follows:

To the universe that is persistently calling…
To those on the path who faithfully listen….

This is for me a different twist on the concept of prayer. You know the saying that prayer is talking to God and meditation is listening to God… it sounds like Eric Butterworth is

saying that prayer is the tool to listen… maybe it's semantics, but for those of us hung up on the word, any new use of the word is welcome.

He writes in the prologue, *"Your prayer is not for God to listen to. True prayer is words that God may utter through you… that you voice, or feel in the silence. You may recall that Jesus said, "The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:24)*

Mr. Butterworth then writes, and this is my favorite quote *"... when we pray, we do not cause God to spring into action. Rather in our praying, we are hearing the call of the universe and responding to it."*

How's that for turning the old definition of prayer on its head?

Very similar to the message from Fr. Rohr—prayer comes from within us—it is the call and response of the Divine in us.

I have learned that prayer is a word, sometimes a charged word, but it is also a practice… and for it to remain a living practice, it must evolve and remain relevant. That might mean that it means different things and expresses itself differently during different stages of our life or spiritual journey, it might mean that it means different things to people of different generations or of different belief systems… and all that is ok. I used to avoid using the word because I didn't want my mother to think I meant what she meant. But what difference does that really make?

"Get over yourself, mom".

I've been accused of throwing out the baby with the bathwater a few times in my life… To throw away a powerful practice because of some childhood notions of strength and weakness seems pretty silly to me right now in my own 2nd half of life.

So today, I offer this invitation to all of us. Next time we are struggling with something and can't figure it out on own—let's try asking for help—dare I say, I'm inviting us to Pray? You can ask God, Jesus, Buddha, Mother Mary, Tara, Lakshmi, the Universe, your higher self, Krishna, your beloved Grandmother, your Angels and Guides, your Ancestors, all of the above or none or the above…. But let's just ask—let's try praying—maybe even out loud—and let's see what happens. Blessed be, blessed be and Amen.

Appendix C: Self-Assessment Questionnaire (pre-class)

1. Name:

2. What is your present religion, if any?

3. Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services - more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?

4. Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?

5. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a religious person?

6. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a spiritual person?

7. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, or never?

8. If you pray, how do you most often pray?
    a. out loud or silently
    b. alone or with another person or group
    c. using scripted prayers or spontaneously

9. Do you meditate at least once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, seldom, or never?

10. If/when asked to pray out loud (family gathering, before a meal, with a close friend, etc.), what level of distress do you feel?

0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
NO DISTRESS	**MILD DISTRESS**	**MODERATE DISTRESS**	**SIGNIFICANT DISTRESS**	**EXTREME DISTRESS**

11. What do you hope to get out of this workshop?

Appendix D: Mid-Class Questionnaire

1. Name:

2. Have there been any surprises to date as a result of taking this workshop—any "aha" moments?

3. At this point in the program, what level of distress do you feel when praying out loud?

0	1	2	3	4
NO DISTRESS	**MILD DISTRESS**	**MODERATE DISTRESS**	**SIGNIFICANT DISTRESS**	**EXTREME DISTRESS**

4. Anything else you'd like to share with me?

Thank you

Nura

Appendix E: Post-Class Questionnaire

1. Name:

2. Were there any surprises as a result of taking the workshop—any "aha" moments?

3. After taking the Pray Like The Poets workshop, If/when asked to pray out loud (family gathering, before a meal, with a close friend, etc.), what level of distress do/will you feel?

0	1	2	3	4
NO DISTRESS	**MILD DISTRESS**	**MODERATE DISTRESS**	**SIGNIFICANT DISTRESS**	**EXTREME DISTRESS**

4. Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.

5. What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?

6. What are the instructor's strengths?

7. What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?

8. What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?

9. How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt?

    1—Fair: sounded mechanical

    2—Good: prayers sounded/felt thoughtful/heartfelt

    3—Excellent: prayers sounded/felt thoughtful/heartfelt and she demonstrated the practices and tools being offered in the course

Appendix F: WORKSHOP SYLLABUS

Pray Like the Poets: Finding Your Voice

the art of spoken prayer

Workshop Description:

While many people are comfortable engaging in a private conversation with the Sacred, the idea of praying out loud can sometimes be intimidating. What if the Divine doesn't care about the words we use? What if our relationship with the Beloved is enriched when we show up as our most authentic selves, speaking the words that are most true to us?

Pray like the Poets is an 8-week experiential workshop on the art of spoken prayer - all faiths (and no faith) are welcome. Together, in the safety of community and with a sense of wonder, we will immerse ourselves in poetry and sacred writings from across traditions and time to help us create our own unique expressions of prayer. We will discuss the different ways of addressing the Mystery and begin our journey by reading aloud pieces that resonate with our individual hearts. As we feel called, we will move into sharing our own prayerful words.

Our class will meet exclusively using Zoom video conferencing technology. Please bring a journal, your favorite poems and sacred writings, a candle to light during our time together, and your sense of curiosity.

Schedule: 8 consecutive Mondays, February 4, 2019-March 25; 6:30-8 ET.

Pre-class (complete and return):

- ~ Pre-class questionnaire
- ~ Waiver

Week One (February 4, 2019)

- ~ Welcome - grounding breaths
- ~ Candle lighting
- ~ Opening reading
- ~ Housekeeping
- ~ Workshop review
  - o How did we get here?
  - o Arc of the class
- ~ Journal exercise
- ~ Participant introductions/sharing
- ~ Facilitated group discussion
- ~ Practice—read aloud a poem to the group and share why you chose it
- ~ Grounding breath
- ~ Until we meet again
- ~ Final words from group
- ~ Closing reading/blow out candles

Week Two (February 11, 2019)

- ~ Welcome - grounding breaths
- ~ Candle lighting
- ~ Opening reflection—invitation to share a poem/prayer
- ~ (Check in—optional)
- ~ Practice: Readings and sharing—gathered and from your own journal
    - o Opportunity for loving feedback: how were you touched by what your classmate read? which words and images got your attention?
- ~ Breath
- ~ Teaching—The Faces and Names of Spirit
- ~ Journal exercise (writing prompt tied to teaching)
- ~ Group discussion/sharing
- ~ For next week: continue to gather sacred writings and write your own
- ~ Closing reflection/blow out candle

Week Three (February 18, 2019)

- ~ Welcome—grounding breaths
- ~ Candle lighting
- ~ Opening dedication(s)—invitation to share poem/prayer
- ~ Check in
- ~ Practice: Readings and sharing—gathered, from your own journal, or resulting from last week's writing prompt
    - o Group discussion
- ~ Grounding breath -opportunity to journal
- ~ Transition—reading from Pádraig Ó Tuama (Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community).
- ~ Practice: Requests for prayers—could be personal or global
    - o moment of silence after the request- this is an opportunity to write if that is more comfortable for you
    - o opportunity to offer prayers—written or spontaneous
- ~ Journal: how does it feel to ask for prayers and how does it feel to prayer for others?
    - o Close exercise with a word or phrase from journal exercise
- ~ Closing dedication(s)/blow out the candles

Week Four (February 25, 2019)

- ~ Welcome - grounding breaths
- ~ Candle lighting
- ~ Opening Contemplation(s)
- ~ Check in
- ~ Practice: Group prayer… one person starts, each adds a line until we reach the end. Would be good to capture in writing so that we have our group prayer.
- ~ Grounding Breath—opportunity to journal
- ~ Transition—reading from Stanley Hauerwas (Prayers Plainly Spoken)
- ~ Practice: Requests for prayers
    - o Group sharing/discussion/journaling
- ~ Preview of weeks 5 & 6

~ Request to complete mid-course questionnaire—will be sent after class- please return before next week's class.
~ Closing contemplation/blow out the candles

Week Five (March 4, 2019)

~ Welcome—grounding breaths
~ Candle lighting
~ Guest teacher—Deborah Jones (www.ninegates.org)

Deborah Jones is the Executive Director of Nine Gates Programs, Inc., serving as the spiritual leader and primary teacher of the Mystery Schools and other Graduate Programs. She is also the Founder of Nine Gates new 11-day experience, the Esoteric School. Deborah has worked intensely with wisdom keepers from around the world, practicing the healing arts, shamanism, the integrative application of the Hindu and Buddhist tantric paths, tribal trance dance, the transpersonal psychology of spiritual awakening through the energy and emotional bodies, and other ancient arts of the wisdom tradition schools.

Cynthia Bourgeault dedicated her book, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene*, to Deborah saying, "To Deborah Jones whose graceful incarnation of Magdalenic energy reassures me that everything I have written in this book is possible." In this way she serves as the cornerstone of Nine Gates' Graduate community.

~ Invitation for this week's practice: Experiment with the practices that Deborah offered—sense into any changes in your prayers/poems.
~ Blow out candles

Week Six (March 11, 2019)

~ Welcome—grounding breaths
~ Candle lighting
~ Guest teacher - Pádraig Ó Tuama (http://www.padraigotuama.com/)

Poet and theologian, Pádraig Ó Tuama's work centers around themes of language, religion, conflict and art. Working fluently on the page and with groups of people, Pádraig is a skilled speaker, teacher and group worker. His work has won acclaim in circles of poetry, politics, religion, psychotherapy and conflict analysis. His books include:

- *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*, Canterbury Press, 2017
- *In the Shelter* Hodder & Stoughton and Hachette Ireland, Feb 2015
- *Sorry for your Troubles*. Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2013
- *Readings from the Books of Exile.* Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2012
- "Human in the City*"* and 12 poems, in *Discovering the Spirit in the City*. London: Continuum 2010.

Since 2014, Pádraig has led Corrymeela, Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organization.

- ~ Invitation: Experiment with the method introduced by Pádraig, sense into any changes in your process
- ~ Closing/blow out candles

Week Seven (March 18, 2019)

- ~ Welcome—grounding breaths
- ~ Candle lighting
- ~ Opening intention(s)
- ~ Check in
- ~ Practice: Readings and sharing—gathered and/or inspired from your own journal
    - o Practice *collect* form that Pádraig introduced
    - o Group sharing/discussion
- ~ Grounding breath - opportunity to journal
- ~ Practice: requests for prayers
    - o Group sharing/discussion
- ~ Closing intention(s)/blow out candles

Week Eight (March 25, 2019)

- ~ Welcome—grounding breaths
- ~ Candle lighting
- ~ Opening Prayer(s)- each person has an opportunity to pray- prayers can be extemporaneous, pre-written or gathered
- ~ Open discussion—forum for feedback and sharing
- ~ Request: Post class questionnaire will be sent via email—please return in the next week
- ~ Invitation for each person to contribute a closing prayer
- ~ Blow out the candles

Appendix G: COMPETENCIES ASSESSMENT

	Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.	**What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?**	**What are the instructor's strengths?**	**What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?**	**What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?**	**How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt? (1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Excellent)**
1	Yes, expectations were always clear	Journaling helped - specifically using some of the tools that were taught to us (ex. The Faces of Spirit, Feeling/Thought).	Nura's strengths are creating a safe space or container where there is no judgement. She really listens and is a gentle spirit guiding us on our prayer journey.	Provide some documentation during/after the course that the students can take with them to remember what they have learned once the course is over.	Loved how you shared suggested poets prior to the start of the class. A workbook/journal during the class could be helpful.	3
2	Yes	The spaciousness of the class helped me to hear from a variety of perspectives, which helped me to think more clearly and creatively.	Easy to communicate with and friendly. Understood the material and also had expectations and clear guidelines of what to expect.	I would make the class a half an hour longer to give everyone an opportunity to speak and to practice praying out loud.	I would encourage starting with a bank of poetry to help facilitate the sharing of poetry and to give participants an idea of ways that the poetry could be used as prayer. At the first class, one other idea is to start by reciting a variety of prayers.	3
3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.	What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?	What are the instructor's strengths?	What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?	What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?	How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt? (1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Excellent)
4	I did understand, the instructor was clear and concise.	Her honesty about her own challenges (sharing) and her enthusiasm + determination to get past that. Listening to other participants and hearing their poetry helped me learn best.	Grounded, excellent listener, good use of silence, kept on time, brought in other teachers which enhanced the course, non-judgmental, encouraging and very loving.	Am at a loss for suggestions. I find Nura to be excellent in all ways.	I would suggest focusing on a few poets and exploring meaning. Mary Oliver, Rumi, Gordon Lightfoot seemed popular in our group. This allowed for closeness within the group (for me) and common ground.	3
5	Yes, I understood	I enjoyed the size of the class … large enough to have diversity yet small enough that there was space for active participation. I enjoyed the spaces for personal reflection. Liked opportunities to tell others what touched me in their offerings	Strong sense of spaciousness in her holding of the group; Her sense of delight; Attitude that she was on the journey with us	Not sure have suggests about instructor's teaching…. More structure with the course… I would introduce collect in the first class so that one practiced writing some between sessions and then saying them out loud to the group so there is more practice of saying one's own words. Also loved the opportunity to say a spontaneous	None	3

	Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.	What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?	What are the instructor's strengths?	What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?	What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?	How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt? (1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Excellent)
				prayer and suggest that gets worked in every class.		
6	Yes. The outline, instructions and expectations were made very clear.	There was no pressure. Nura had a wonderful timing and knew when to add something to the quiet times.	Very clear instructions. Ability to empathize with others in the class about what they might be feeling. Extremely good listener and was able to process what was being said by the participants.	None.	I appreciated the use of the shared online folder. There were a lot of book titles mentioned that I was not always able to catch.	3
7	Yes. Nura previewed the workshop's big picture, and would preview each week. This was an important facilitation each time.	Nura never moved into "teacher" role. Rather, she sat beside us as students. This built a sense of safety in the learning.	Nura is gifted at providing the emotional space for the depth of this learning to resonate for each person.	As someone who manages facilitators for a living, I rarely say this, but it is true: Nura has very very little to improve upon with her facilitation of this workshop. It was utterly skillful. She should be overjoyed.	I absolutely loved Padraig's contribution to the workshop's goals.	3
8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.	What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?	What are the instructor's strengths?	What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?	What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?	How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt? (1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Excellent)
9	Yes	Nura was a great leader, good communication skills, direct and other loving companions.	Well prepared, great follow though, patient, loving caring, very present during the sessions. Excellent leader and teacher.	None at this point.	She is well prepared and offered many resources and material	3
10	Yes, the invitation to prepare and participate was always clear and welcoming.	Most of all it was the safe space created and the gentle invitation to stretch out of our comfort zones. In addition to Nura's gifts as an instructor, the two guest presenters offered both tangible instruction and inspiration. (Pádraig Ó Tuama!) Learning came through a combination of technique and healing my fearful resistance.	Nura's compassionate presence, gentle strength, and willingness to show her own vulnerability made it easy to step into the anxious unknown of this class. Because I felt comfortable tending to my feelings of inadequacy around prayer, I was able to loosen their grip and lessen my feelings of inadequacy. I'm so grateful for Nura's flexibility	I can't think of a thing, honestly.	I would have liked a little more background about the guests in advance of their teaching (Deborah in particular because I knew of Pádraig)—although maybe that was provided and I overlooked it.	3

	Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.	What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?	What are the instructor's strengths?	What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?	What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?	How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt? (1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Excellent)
			in allowing me to come late to class on days I couldn't get home from work in time.			
11	I did. It was very clear.	The exercises we did during the class, followed by sharing. It was also great to hear from the others and have them share poetry/pray, etc.	Patience, caring, making it a very safe space.	Nothing in the teaching.	I would have everyone bring in a prayer that they wrote each week. Also, perhaps people might be encouraged to interview other people who are very comfortable at public prayer and see what it is they do to allow the words to flow effortlessly. That info can be brought back to the group to share with the others.	3

	Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.	What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?	What are the instructor's strengths?	What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?	What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?	How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt? (1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Excellent)
12	Yes	The authentic sharing of instructor and participants was incredibly valuable—and willingness to pray imperfectly. Also appreciate the guest instructor practices—a reminder to tune into energetic alignment from Deborah, and the collect structure from Padraig.	Creating a warm and safe environment, holding space, and invitations to step into discomfort (with permission to abstain). Wonderful job validating all that was offered.	Previously mentioned observations about voice modulation—(I have a hunch that this changes as the class is repeated and the roadmap is more familiar)	This is specifically for any future attendees who would participate by recording instead of live: While I found the sessions quite valuable as a remote observer, I can sense that the real payoff is in both personal engagement with other participants and the chance to be witnessed. I'll confess to not being as committed to daily journaling and prayer without being accountable to a group. And also realize that I rarely spoke out loud, even when writing in class. Yet it's the OUT LOUD part that matters, lol. Perhaps if there's a non-live version of this envisioned for future students, they could commit to dyad or triad meetings with fellow remote participants, so	3

	Did you usually understand what was expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.	What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching helped you learn best?	What are the instructor's strengths?	What suggestions do you have to improve the instructor's teaching?	What suggestions do you have for resources or materials to improve the workshop content/flow?	How effective was the instructor as a prayer leader, offering prayers that were thoughtful/heartfelt? (1-Fair, 2-Good, 3-Excellent)
					this is not lost opportunity?	

Appendix H: WORKSHOP "AHA" MOMENTS

	Mid-Class: Have there been any surprises to date as a result of taking this workshop - any "aha" moments?	Post-Class: Have there been any surprises to date as a result of taking this workshop - any "aha" moments?
1	Surprised that there are others who also feel anxious praying out loud. I am thankful to learn there are methods/frameworks for prayer that can help reduce stress. Much of my anxiety is produced own thinking/over thinking. This class is helping me simplify my thoughts and prayers.	Biggest "aha" moment for me was the realization that I wasn't alone in my fear of praying out loud. This course helped me begin to release my fears through learning, practices; hearing from others.
2	Yes, I feel as if I am experiencing an acceptance of using prayer as poetry and poetry as prayer. I am also becoming more interested in looking at ways that I pray. For example, my prayer often is inspired by a need or desire to express my gratitude or to ask for something. Finding the poetry that helps me to express my feelings has been helpful in owning and connecting with my higher power. I then have found myself wanting to turn my prayer into some type of art or visual. I wasn't expecting such creativity.	The biggest a-ha for me was that I found great comfort knowing that all of you were praying for me and my family as my mom was dying. I never realized how much intentional prayer could affect me and just knowing that you were all praying for us filled me on an energetic level. Secondly, I am still noticing that I am feeling more and more comfortable with using poetry as prayer. Even the way in which I speak and write to others has changed from this experience. I do not feel comfortable praying out loud yet, but I am feeling really comfortable putting it down on paper and that is a step closer to where I was. When I am able to write it down and then read my prayer, I don't feel as though I have pressure put on me. I have been listening deeply to other people as they pray, just to hear the flow and to note their hesitations to help me to recognize that we are all just human. My discomfort comes from the possibility becoming stuck while praying off the top of my head, which is why it is helping me to get out of my perfectionist thinking. Something I have learned about myself is that the way I communicate tends to be in metaphor, but short and sweet; to the point. Others use lots of beautiful language to say something similar. I am learning what my style is with prayer and this class has helped me to identify what works for me now. As time goes on and I am more public with my prayers, I imagine that I will evolve.
3	N/A	N/A
4	Focusing on the power or prayer slows down mental chatter.	Poetry is prayer.
5	Love the act of slowing down and being in community. Always shocked at how much that feeds my soul.	• How much delivery affects the receiver of the prayer Both on a superficial way (Padraig's accent) and an authentic offering (deep heart felt) • Reminded again of how I am not alone in my experiences • And how powerful being seen and heard in community is for me

	Mid-Class: Have there been any surprises to date as a result of taking this workshop - any "aha" moments?	Post-Class: Have there been any surprises to date as a result of taking this workshop - any "aha" moments?
6	I've been afraid of poetry for many years. I am becoming more comfortable. I really like to hear others offer their poems. Also, I am enjoying the prayer offering of others. I'm not there yet with my own offerings	Yes. I was extremely apprehensive about the workshop, but I had heard so much about Nura I knew I could trust her and the process. Because of this workshop, I shared a poem out loud for the first time in my life. The last time I tried to write a poem was in elementary school.
7	Yes. Several. (1) Noticing that prayers can be offered to the God within, the "other person" God, and the almighty God. (2) The "community-as-leader" model of facilitation (where we all offer a reading, a prayer, etc.) is such a powerful way to build community, and (3) my own self-awareness that public prayer feels performative to me (and it needn't be so).	I find the faces of God to be meaningful. I found that doing spontaneous prayer was both anxiety-producing and meaningful.
8	N/A	N/A
9	I love the meeting of each week and sharing prayers and the timing **for** me was perfect.	Poetry was not an intimate partner for me. Almost a bit of fear, more like an uncomfortable expression for me. This has opened me to poetry more as a form of prayer. I have dabbled in it and now I am diving in for more. I am really loving the experimentation of using the collect for a format for prayers. Today my friend asked me for prayers around his loan application I was able to text him a collect and last night a friend was having a situation ... and in the form of the collect I sent the prayer out to him.
10	I'm coming to greater clarity about my own inclinations toward prayer as a preference for invoking blessings… not exactly an "aha" moment, but more like a gentle unfolding.	I led a prayer of grace with my Catholic family! Big aha!
11	N/A	When Padraig suggested I refer to the Divine as a sharp knife (or something like that). That took me outside of the box for sure! I think if I had been able to put more time into it, I might have had a few more aha moments.
12	I'm surprised by how emotionally invested I am in the other video participants, who I will never get to engage with. I find myself deeply moved by the personal sharing, and longing to share myself.	A primary 'aha' is that I originally connected my general aversion to public prayer to performance anxiety… but the inquiry and practices suggested in these teachings has pointed out that my biggest obstacle is the fact that I do not recognize divinity as a personalized being, so languaging has been inadequate from my own lived experience. Reframing as poetry—and the many ways that divinity can be creatively named via the collect practice—have softened this resistance and provided possibilities for ways to bridge this gap when the listeners do have personalized concepts and I'm attempting to meet them there in an authentic way.

Appendix I: RESOURCES

Websites/Subscriptions

° www.poetryfoundation.org ° www.poetrysociety.org/psa/ ° www.poems.com ° www.poets.org ° www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/find-poets ° http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/	° www.poetryarchive.org/ (hear poets reading their poems) ° www.poetseers.org/index.html ° www.familyfriendpoems.com ° www.gratefulness.org ° www.onespiritinterfaith.org/inspirational-quotes-archive/ (subscribe for Daily Inspiration) ° Panhala, subscribe for daily poems: send a blank email to Panhala-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Sampling of Poets/Writers

Alden Solovy (US/Israel)	Marilyn Nelson (US)
Anne Lamott (US)	Mark Nepo (US)
Annie Dillard (US)	Mary Oliver (US)
Bessie Rayner Parkes (England, 1829-1925)	Maya Angelou (US, 1928-2014)
C.P. Cavafy (Egypt, 1863-1933)	Mechthild of Magdeburg (Germany, 1207-1282)
Cynthia Bourgeault, (US)	Mirabai (India, 1498—1546)
David Whyte (England)	Mirabai Starr (US)
e. e. cummings (US, 1894-1962)	Nikki Giovanni (US)
Elizabeth Bishop (US, 1911-1979)	Normandi Ellis (US)
Gerard Manley Hopkins (England, 1844-89)	Pádraig Ó Tuama (Ireland)
Hafiz (Persia, 1325-1390)	Parker Palmer (US)
Henri Nouwen (US, 1932-1996)	Philip Larkin (England, 1922-1985)
Hildegard of Bingen (Germany, 1098-1179)	Rabia Al Basri (Iraq, 713-801)
Ibn ‘Arabi (Spain, Syria 1165-1240)	Rainer Maria Rilke (Bohemian-Austrian, 1875-1926)
Izumi Shikibu (Japan, 974?-1034?)	Ram Dass (US)
Jan Phillips (US)	Richard Rohr (US)
Jane Hirshfield (US)	Robert Frost (US, 1874-1963)

John of the Cross (Spain, 1542-1591)	Rumi (Persia, 1207-1273)
John O'Donohue (Ireland, 1956-2008)	Sylvia Path (US, 1932-1963)
Julian of Norwich (England, 1342-1416)	Teresa of Avila (Spain, 1515-1582)
Kobayashi Issa (Japan, 1763-1827)	Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnam/US)
Laura Grace Weldon (US)	Thomas Keating (US, 1923-2018)
Marianne Williamson (US)	Thomas Merton (US, 1915-1969)
	T.S. Eliot (US/England, 1888-1965)

APPENDIX J:
Prayer Structures
(from *Simply Pray* by Erik Walker Wikstrom)

The Lord's Prayer	Structure:	Example offered by Wikstrom:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.	~ Begin with a salutation. ~ State your intentions regarding the sacred (and praise for the Holy). ~ State your requests regarding yourself. ~ Being the prayer to a close.	O Spirit that dwells within us all—may you be known and loved. May your insight guide us, may your compassion fill us, until this world is holy and whole. May we receive the things we most need for body and soul, and may we never stray from our heart's true path. Until the sun burns out and stars grow cold. Amen.
The Twenty-Third Psalm	Structure:	Example offered by Wikstrom:
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides	~ Begin with a metaphor for the Holy. ~ Describe how the metaphor affects you. ~ Develop the metaphor further.	O God, you are a playful puppy; I'll never be lonely. You knock me over in your desire to have fun. You return eagerly no matter how I behave. You calm my spirit.

me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.	~ Recognize the reality that life will continue to be difficult. ~ Describe what gives you comfort. ~ Give voice to what reassures you.	You remind me to keep things in perspective because the only thing that matters you is love. Even though life can threaten to crash in on me I will not be overcome; your bark and soft fur soothe me. You bring me to the park to play in the middle of the work week. You lick my face and my hands. We never get tired. Together we'll keep playing as long as we live. And the sun will shine always.
Thomas Merton's Prayer: My Lord God - I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually	Structure: ~ Give a name to the relationship you have with the sacred and holy. ~ Acknowledge the aspect of the human condition that currently concerns you. ~ Confess your own deepest weakness.	Example offered by Wikstrom: Nameless Presence—there is so much more that I don't know than what I do know. I could spend a lifetime studying one aspect of one facet of one thing and still only scratch the surface. And I don't even know all that I don't know—I often think I know things, and even more often pretend to know things, of

doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.	~ Make a statement of your belief about the sacred. ~ Offer a response, intention, or promise. ~ Remember how this has been shown to be true in your life. ~ Make a declaration of the confidence that comes from this recognition.	which I am actually completely ignorant. Yet I believe that what I most need to know is my relationship, through you, to all that is. And I want to be satisfied with this. For I know that when I rest in this simple knowledge, all that I need comes to me. Therefore, I will gently return my focus to you, who was and is and evermore shall be, and all will be well.
A Bodhisattva's Prayer May I be a protector to those without protection, a leader for those who journey, and a boat, a bridge, a passage for those desiring the further shore. May the pain of every living creature Be completely cleared away.	Structure: ~ Metaphorically depict the spiritual journey and your intention to help others. ~ Metaphorically depict the essence of the human experience and how you can help. ~ Declare the boundaries of your alliance and the "bottom line" against which you will measure all of your actions.	Example offered by Wikstrom: May I be light to those in darkness, food to the hungry, and the alarm clock, the wake-up call, the morning cup of coffee for those who would need awaken. May the fear of every being be completely assuaged. May I be the engineer and the architect and the demolition crew, assisting all the alienated and isolated beings until all

May I be the doctor and the medicine and may I be the nurse for all sick beings in the world until everyone is healed. Just like space and the great elements such as earth, may I always support the life of all the boundless creatures. And until they pass away from pain may I also be the source of life for all the realms of varied beings that reach unto the ends of space.	~ Declare the boundaries of the circle of your concern.	of the dividing walls are completely torn down. Just like air and the element of water, may I always cleanse and clarify revealing truth in its myriad forms. And until the earth falls into the sun, may I inquire and encourage the complete unfolding of the beauty's potential in all things throughout space and time.
Starhawk's Prayer Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the East, Powers of Air! We invoke you and call you, Golden Eagle of the Dawn, Star-seeker, Whirlwind, Rising Sun, Come! By the air that is Her breath.	Structure: ~ Begin by calling on the images you associate with the east. ~ Call on that which you associate with the south. ~ Call on the symbols you connect with the west.	Example offered by Wikstrom: Spirits of the East, Powers of the Air, I greet you! I call upon the soft dew of the dawn, the fragrant breezes of the springtime, the gentle coo of the morning dove—watch over that which is coming to birth in my life, all that is almost but not yet. By the air that surrounds

Send forth your light. Be here now! Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the South, Powers of Fire! We invoke you and call you, Red Lion of the noon heat, Flaming One! Summer's warmth, Spark of life, Come! By the fire that is Her spirit, send forth your flame. Be here now! Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the West, Powers of Water! We invoke you and call you, Serpent of the watery abyss, Rainmaker, Gray-robed Twilight, Evening Star! By the waters of Her living womb, Send forth your flow. Be here now! Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the North, Powers of Earth, Cornerstone of all Power. We invoke you and call you,	~ Call on the things that make you think of the north. ~ Describe your intention and the sacred space you have created through your prayer.	the whole earth and flows within me, come softly. Spirits of the South, Powers of Fire, I greet you! I call upon the strong sun of the noonday, the dynamic heat of the summer's burning, the invincible roar of the lion—lend me strength whenever I fear and falter. By the fire that transforms and enlightens, come brightly. Spirits of the West, Powers of Water, I greet you! I call upon the quiet cool of the evening, the crisp colors of autumn, the dignified grace of dolphin—help me to swim through the ebb and flows of life maintaining equilibrium and equanimity. By the water that buoys, come steadily. Spirits of the North, Powers of the Earth, I greet you! I call upon the impenetrable silence of midnight, the clarifying cold of midwinter, the unyielding stability of the mountains—ground my every step and

Lady of the Outer Darkness, Black Bull of Midnight, North Star, Center of the whirling sky. Stone, Mountain, Fertile Field, Come! By the earth that is her body, send forth your strength. Be here now! The circle is cast. We are between the worlds, beyond the bounds of time, where night and day, birth and death, joy and sorrow, meet as one. The fire is lit, the ritual is begun.		support my every endeavor. By the earth that makes all things grow, come decisively. The circle is cast. I stand at the balance point where within and without, above and below, sacred and secular unite and intertwine. The dance has begun. So, shall it be.

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